

# *Horizon*

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

---

## THE TWELVE

*by* ALEXANDER BLOK

## 'WE'RE MOVING'

*by* MASS-OBSERVATION

## THE POETRY OF BORIS PASTERNAK

*by* J. M. COHEN

## LAURENCE STERNE—III

*by* PETER QUENNEL

## CONSTRUCTIVE ART

AN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS

*between* NAUM GABO *and* HERBERT READ

## SENSITIVENESS

*by* GIORGIO DE CHIRICO

## MUSIC: SOME ASPECTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY PROBLEM—II

*by* EDWARD SACKVILLE-WEST

REPRODUCTIONS OF CONSTRUCTIONS *by* NAUM GABO

---

MONTHLY: TWO SHILLINGS NET

JULY VOL. X, No. 55 1944

*Edited by Cyril Connolly*

PL

PL

## NEW POETS NUMBER

PL  
X*Ready next month*

EDITIONS POETRY LONDON

PL

PL

## THE PEOPLE'S THEATRE

RYE HILL

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

The Committee has pleasure in announcing the first annual play-writing competition in which a prize of £20 is offered for the best play submitted. In addition, the judges will recommend production by the People's Theatre should the prize-winning play be of sufficiently high standard.

*Full particulars may be obtained on application to MR. LEONARD SCOTT, at The People's Theatre, Rye Hill, Newcastle upon Tyne, enclosing stamped and addressed envelope.*

## WALES

Edited by KEIDRYCH RHYS

No. 4, JUNE, 1944, includes

LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

Towards a Welsh Theatre

HERBERT M. VAUGHAN

South Wales Squires Again

ROBERT GRAVES

Taliesin's Mythology: Bards &amp; Gleemen

SILAS M. HARRIS

Was St. David Canonized?

JOHN COWPER POWYS Wales &amp; America

GEORGE EWART EVANS Alun Lewis

ERIC HARDY

The Welsh National Wild Life

ROLAND MATHIAS

Digression into Miracle

IVOR LEWIS In the Midst of Life

JOHN PENNANT Radio Review

JOHN LEGONNA Political Commentary

WALTER DOWDING Market Square

DAVID JONES Welsh Visual Art

Poems, Translations, Reviews by

VERNON WATKINS, JOHN ORMOND

THOMAS, DILYS ROWE, WYN GRIFFITH,

P. Mansell Jones.

Bibliography: W. J. Gruffydd.

Notes and Correspondence.

2s. 6d. Quarterly. 10s. 8d. a year post free

Wales, 8 Guilford Pl., London, W.C.1



# Fontaine

*Revue Mensuelle de la Poésie et des  
lettres françaises*

EDITOR: MAX-POL FOUCHET

No. 33

EMMANUEL D'ASTIER	Sept jours en été
'JEAN DU HAUT'	Cinq poèmes d'amour en guerre
C.-F. RAMUZ	Pages de journal
PIERRE EMMANUEL	Filles de Lot
JEAN ORIEUX	La Lampe de Moulay
EUGENIO DE ANDRADE	Adolescent
(Traduit du portugais par A. GUIBERT)	
RACHEL BESPALOFF	Sur l'Iliade
CLAUDE ROY	Clair comme le jour
HENRI HELL	Jean Giraudoux ou de la littérature

## CHRONIQUES

HAROLD NICOLSON	Pour un nouvelle entente cordiale
GEORGES BLIN	Lettres Stendhaliennes

Les livres et les revues

## COULEUR DU TEMPS

par DENIS DE ROUGEMONT, JEAN GRENIER,  
Z. SCHAKOWSKOY, PIERRE ROBIN, E. TERRACINI,  
HÉLÈNE BOKANOWSKI, HENRI HELL,  
MAX-POL FOUCHET

Bibliographie Française

## BULLETIN

SUBSCRIPTION RATES, 30s. per annum

*Ten numbers, including two double numbers*

*Single numbers 3s.*

*Double numbers, 6s. each*

*from Sole Agents in Great Britain,*

HORIZON, 6 Selwyn House, Lansdowne Terrace, W.C.1

*TERMINUS 4998*

# FABER POETRY

by W. H. AUDEN

Poems

Look, Stranger!

The Orators

The Dance of Death

Selected Poems

Another Time

New Year Letter

with Louis MacNeice

Letters from Iceland

by GEORGE BARKER

Poems

Calamiterror

Lament and Triumph

by ROY CAMPBELL

Adamastor

by WALTER DE LA MARE

Collected Poems

Collected Rhymes and Verses

Bells and Grass

Peacock Pie

Songs of Childhood

Stuff and Nonsense and So On

The Fleeting and other poems

The Listeners and other poems

Memory and other poems

Motley and other poems

The Veil and other poems

by LAWRENCE DURRELL

A Private Country

by T. S. ELIOT

Collected Poems 1909-1935

Sweeney Agonistes

Four Quartets

Murder in the Cathedral

The Family Reunion

by WILLIAM EMPSON

The Gathering Storm

by GEOFFREY FABER

The Buried Stream: Collected Poems

by SEÁN JENNETT

Always Adam

by LOUIS MACNEICE

The Earth Compels

Autumn Journal

Poems

Agamemnon of Aeschylus (trans.)

Out of the Picture

Plant and Phantom

by EDWIN MUIR

The Narrow Place

by NORMAN NICHOLSON

Five Rivers

by EZRA POUND

Selected Poems

by HERBERT READ

The End of a War

Poems 1914-1934

by ANNE RIDLER

The Nine Bright Shiners

by MICHAEL ROBERTS

Orion Marches

by A. L. ROWSE

Poems of a Decade

Poems Chiefly Cornish

by SIEGFRIED SASSOON

The Road to Ruin

Rhymed Ruminations

by STEPHEN SPENDER

Poems

The Still Centre

Ruins and Visions

by HENRY TREECE

Invitation and Warning

Second Coming

by VERNON WATKINS

The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd

24 RUSSELL SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1

# HORIZON

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

Vol. X No. 55 July 1944

## CONTENTS

PAGE

THE TWELVE	<i>Alexander Blok</i>	5
Translated by C. M. Bowra		
'WE'RE MOVING'	<i>Mass-Observation</i>	14
THE POETRY OF BORIS PASTERNAK	<i>J. M. Cohen</i>	23
LAURENCE STERNE—III	<i>Peter Quennell</i>	36
CONSTRUCTIVE ART:		
AN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS	<i>Naum Gabo</i>	57
	<i>Herbert Read</i>	63
SENSITIVENESS	<i>Giorgio de Chirico</i>	65
MUSIC: SOME ASPECTS OF THE		
CONTEMPORARY PROBLEM—II	<i>Edward Sackville-West</i>	68

REPRODUCTIONS of constructions by NAUM GABO  
appear between pages 64 and 65.

*The editorial and publishing Offices of HORIZON are at 6 Selwyn House, Lansdowne Terrace, W.C.1.—Six months' subscription, 12/6 net, including postage, U.S.A.—\$2.50. Agents for U.S.A. & Canada: Gotham Book Mart, 51 West 47th Street, New York City, U.S.A. For advertising terms please write to The Business Manager, Terminus 4898*

*All MSS. submitted should be accompanied by a stamped, addressed envelope, and will not be returned if this is not enclosed*

# **Cyril Connolly's**

TRANSLATION OF VERCORS' FAMOUS BOOK

## ***Le Silence de la Mer***

BROUGHT OUT OF OCCUPIED FRANCE.  
THIS MEMORABLE STORY IS NOW  
PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH UNDER THE  
TITLE

**PUT OUT THE LIGHT**

3s. 6d.

\*

\*

\*

NEW VERSE OF OUTSTANDING QUALITY

## ***Eiluned Lewis***

**MORNING SONGS AND OTHER POEMS**

This is a collection of poetry by the author of *Dew on the Grass* and *The Captain's Wife*. 4s.

## ***John Buxton***

**SUCH LIBERTY**

The author has been a prisoner since the campaign in Norway, and some of the best poems have been written during this confinement. They are in the classical tradition, and it is conceivable that these verses will be judged to be as good as the best of the last war. 4s.

## ***D. Page***

**THE MARTYR AND OTHER POEMS**

The longest poem in the book, *The Martyr*, is Browningsque in style. It is dramatic and full of vivid images. This collection is likely to find favour amongst those who like modern poetry and who welcome what is melodious, moving and sincere. 4s.

---

**Macmillan & Co., Ltd.**



# ALEXANDER BLOK

## THE TWELVE

*Translated from the Russian by C. M. BOWRA*

### NOTE

ALEXANDER BLOK wrote *The Twelve* in January 1918. Composed, it is said, in a single night, it expresses the supernatural excitement which resulted from the Russian Revolution and the hopes for a regeneration of humanity which he found in it. The poem is written in conversational language and often in slang; its rhythms, based sometimes on factory songs, are as vivid as they are various. It won an enormous success, was recited nightly to large crowds and translated into several languages. The present translation aims at keeping the original metres and at being as literal as translation into verse allows.

### I

Black dusk grows,  
Snow falls white.  
Wind, wind blows!  
On his legs a man can't stand upright.  
Wind, wind blows—  
Through all creation the wind goes.  
  
The wind twists and twirls  
The white snow.  
There is ice below;  
Heavy, slippery,—  
If you try to go,  
Down you fall—what a pity!  
  
From building to building see  
Stretched out a great string,  
From it a banner swing:  
'All power to the Constituent Assembly!'  
A weeping old woman has scanned it,  
She cannot understand it:  
'What's the use of all that stuff,  
That enormous notice there?  
To clothe a whole people it's enough,  
But all go unshod and bare.'  
  
The old woman, like a hen,  
Staggered along across the piles of snow.  
'O Mother who intercedest for men,  
The Bolsheviks drive us below!'  
  
The wind pierces;  
Sharper the frost grows.  
At the street-corner the bourgeois'  
Coat-collar hides his nose.

## HORIZON

Who is that with hair fluttering?  
 Under his voice muttering:  
     'All is betrayed!  
     Russia exists no more!'  
 He must be a writer by trade,  
 Or an orator.

Another, long-skirted,  
 Hides behind the snow.  
 Why are you down-hearted,  
 Comrade priest, now?

Think how marched your swaying  
 Paunch in front of you,  
 With a cross displaying  
 Light the whole land through.

A lady in a lambskin coat  
 And her friend have a chat:  
 'Oh the tears, the tears we shed . . .'  
     Then end to end, pat,  
 She slips and falls down flat.

Poor sweet!  
 Put her on her feet.

The wild wind hurts,  
 Malignant, gay,  
 It flutters skirts,  
 Slashes passers-by,  
 Shakes, quakes and makes fly  
 The great placard away:  
 'All power to the Constituent Assembly!'  
 And voices float by . . .

. . . 'We held our committee . . .  
 . . . In that part of the city . . .  
     Passed conclusions  
     And resolutions . . .  
 Ten for an hour, twenty the whole night . . .  
 To take less isn't right . . .  
 Come to bed, mate.'

The darkness grows.  
 The streets are dead.  
 A single beggar droops his head.  
 The wind's whistle blows.

Oh poor fellow,  
 Come here,  
 Let's have a kiss.



Bread?  
What's up there?  
Keep Clear!  
Black, black sky overhead.  
Hate, sorrowful hate  
Seethes in the heart . . .  
Black hate, holy hate . . .  
Comrade, keep smart,  
Look straight!

## II

The wind reels, the snow dances;  
A party of twelve men advances.  
Black rifle-slings upon their backs,  
And flame, flame, flame about their tracks.  
With crumpled caps, lips smoking fags,  
All should be branded as prison lags.  
Freedom, freedom, ha!  
But no Cross, aha!  
Tra-ta-ta.  
It's cold, comrades, it's cold.  
'Vanya and Katya wet their throats;  
Her stockings are packed with Kerensky notes.  
'Now Vanya's rich and prosperous;  
He joined up, though he was one of us.  
'Vanya, son of a bitch, bourgeois,  
Just kiss my girl and get off with her.  
Freedom, freedom, ha!  
But no Cross, aha!  
Vanya and Katya are together—  
What are they doing together?  
Tra-ta-ta.  
With flame, flame, flame about their tracks,  
And rifles slung upon their backs.  
Revolutionaries, mind you keep  
In step. The enemy does not sleep.  
Don't shrink, comrade. Get your rifle out;  
Give Holy Russia a taste of shot.  
At the wooden land,  
Where the poor huts stand,  
And her rump so grand!  
Aha, but no Cross!

## HORIZON

## III

When our boys joined up to fight,  
To be soldiers with the Reds,  
To be soldiers with the Reds,  
And lay down their frenzied heads—

Ah, a bitter bitterness,  
A sweet life we've won,  
With a tattered overcoat  
And an Austrian gun.

All the bourgeois will despair  
When we set the world on fire,  
Set the world on fire—in blood—  
Send Thy blessing on us, God!

## IV

Snow eddies, the coachman cries;  
Vanya past with Katya flies,  
And the electric lamp's light shifts  
On the carriage shafts.  
Ho, ho, bow low!

He, in soldier's overcoat,  
Twists his black moustache about  
On his idiotic face.  
Watch him smile on her,  
Try his style on her.

That's your Vanya, broad of back,  
That's your Vanya—talk's his knack.  
Silly Katya he embraces,  
Shows her all his paces.

Into his her face she shows,  
Bares her teeth in pearly rows . . .  
Ah, my Katya, Katya mine,  
Your fat face is fine.

## V

Katya, on your neck a gash is  
From my knife—and does not heal.  
Underneath your breast my slashes,  
Katya, left another weal.

Dance then, dance for me!  
Your fine feet are good to see.

White lace underclothes you kept then,—  
 Ply the streets and play your part,—  
 With the officers you slept then,—  
 Be a tart then, be a tart.

Well, well, be a tart.  
 From my breast leaps out my heart.

Once an officer preferred you,—  
 And my knife was in his flesh.  
 Ah, you pox, has that not stirred you?  
 Is the memory not fresh?

Well, refresh me too!  
 I should like to sleep with you.

In grey gaiters you went walking;  
 Fancy chocolate was your style.  
 With cadets you did the talking;  
 Now you go with rank and file?

Well, well, sin away!  
 It will keep the spirit gay.

## VI

Again at a gallop the coachman flies  
 And charges past with yells and cries.

Halt there, you! Halt! Now, Andrew, mind,  
 And Peter, follow up behind.

Trac-tararac-tac-tac-tac-tac,  
 The snow whirls skyward in his track.

The coachman flies, and Vanya too.  
 Take your aim on them, all of you.

Trac-tararac. You soon will learn  
 Not to take your friend's girl for a turn.

\* \* \*

The blackguard's gone. Well, just you wait.  
 Tomorrow I shall put it straight.

But where is Katya, where? Dead, dead!  
 Shot by a bullet through the head.

Do you like that Katya? Not a sound.  
 Lie, carrion, on the snowy ground.

Revolutionaries, mind you keep  
 In step. The enemy does not sleep.

## VII

On the twelve men march again,  
Every rifle in its place.  
Only the poor murderer's pain  
Drives all colour from his face.

Faster, ever faster shuffles  
On his hurried step away;  
And his neck a wrapper muffles,  
Nothing now can make him gay.

'Why are you down-hearted, chum?  
Why, friend, do you feel so low?  
Peter, why are you so glum?  
Does your Katya sting you so?

Oh my comrades, friends of mine,  
How I used to love that lass!  
Night of darkness, night of wine  
Drunkenly we used to pass.

'Ah, her eyes that flared afar  
Flaming with a crazy light,  
Ah, the little crimson star  
By her shoulder on the right!  
Stupidly I murdered her,  
Murdered her from raging spite.

'Stop that silly tune, will you?  
You're a woman, you old fool.  
What is it you think you do  
Turning inside out your soul?  
Give your pride a thought or two.  
What about your self-control?

'This is not a time to spare  
For your troubles without end.  
We shall have a load to bear  
Heavier than this, my friend.'

So his pace poor Peter slows,  
No more leaves the rest behind;  
Proudly up his head he throws,  
Is his happy self again.

Well, well,  
Fun won't send you down to Hell.  
Lock up all the handsome homes!  
Now the time of looting comes.  
Fling the cellars open, all!  
'Tis the beggars' carnival.



## THE TWELVE

II

### VIII

Oh miserable misery!  
Black boredom fills me  
And kills me.

Long hours on watch  
I shall wait, I shall wait.

Now I shall scratch  
My old pate, my old pate.

Sunflower-seed  
I shall split, I shall split.

With my knife-blade  
I shall slit, I shall slit.

Clear out, bourgeois, off with you!  
I shall drink in blood  
To your love's hot flood,  
And your eyes' black-hood.

Give rest, O Lord, to the soul of Thy servant.  
What a bore!

### IX

On all the Nevski buildings, peace.  
The city's din has died away.  
Comrade, there are no more police.  
Without a drop to drink, be gay!

The bourgeois, where the roads divide,  
Stands with his nose sunk in his fur;  
And, hairy, shivers at his side  
With drooping tail, a poor whipped cur.

Like the dog, stands the bourgeois, hungry,  
A silent question to the sky;  
The old world, like a homeless mongrel,  
With tail between its legs stands by.

### X

The wind grows stronger—what a wind!  
Oh the wind, the wind!

Hardly can a friend see friend  
Following four steps behind.

Black the snow that twists and twirls,  
Like a pillar upward curls.

## HORIZON

—‘Saviour! what a storm it is!’  
 —‘Peter, don’t talk stuff like this.  
 What can all that nonsense do,  
 Those gold images, for you?  
 What is it you talk about?  
 Try to reason, think it out.  
 Stains of blood upon your hand  
 Come from your loved Katya, friend!’  
 —‘Comrades, watch your step. I fear  
 Sleepless enemies are near.’

March on, march on, march on,  
 Workers in unison!

## XI

On without God’s holy name they swing;  
 Still the twelve go marching on,  
 Ready for anything,  
 Pitying none.

Loudly the steel rifles blaze  
 Volleys on the unseen foe;  
 By deserted passage-ways  
 Through the ceaseless storm they go.  
 Heavy boots are hard to raise  
 From the downy drifts of snow.

In their eyes shaking  
 The red flag blows;

Loud the unbreaking  
 March onward goes.

Over there, waking  
 Are brutal foes.

In their eyes the wind alight  
 Day and night  
 Stops for none.

On, workers, on  
 In unison!

## XII

On with sovereign step they go . . .  
 —‘Who is hiding there? Get out!’  
 Nothing but the gusts that blow  
 Flapping a red flag about.

There's an icy drift ahead.  
—'Who is in the drift? Get out!'  
Only a poor dog, unfed,  
Hobbles on behind the rout.

—'Off, you mangy beast, or itch  
With a taste of bayonet.  
Old world, like a scabby bitch,  
I shall flay you! Out you get!'

It shows teeth in wolfish grin,  
Follows tail down, does not care,  
Frozen dog, dog without kin.  
—'Answer quickly, who goes there?'

'Who flaps that red flag ahead?  
Can you see him? What a night!  
Who is it with silent tread  
Lurks about us out of sight?

'We shall get you, all the lot.  
Best give in while breathing still!  
Friend, I'll put you on the spot;  
Look out, or I shoot to kill.'

Trac-tac-tac, and nothing after;  
Echoes from the buildings blow.  
Nothing but the wind's long laughter  
Sings in answer on the snow.

Trac-tac-tac  
Trac-tac-tac

On they march with sovereign tread,  
With a starving dog behind,  
With a blood-red flag ahead—  
In the storm where none can see,  
From the rifle bullets free,  
Gently walking on the snow,  
Where like pearls the snowflakes glow,  
Marches rose-crowned in the van  
Jesus Christ, the Son of Man.

## MASS-OBSERVATION

# 'WE'RE MOVING'

HISTORY broke in three hours late to the daily routine of many citizens on 6 June. A few, like this working-class housewife, felt it in the air when they woke at dawn:

'I knew summat was on directly I 'eard them planes going over, in the night. Thousands of them. I must 'ave dozed off, for 'e (pointing at husband) woke me up and asked the time. Funny like, I says "'Ave a look at the clock, that'll tell yer," and 'e says, "The clock's stopped at 'arf past five". "Stopped", I says, "it's never stopped since yer father died. Summat's 'appened, I can feel it. It must be the second front's begun." And when I got to work the manager comes in and 'as a word with the manageress and she switches the wireless on, and we all listened to the one o'clock news. Eeeh! yer could 'ave 'eard a pin drop; and me eyes all filled with tears as I thought of them young boys and what the poor things must 'ave gone through. 'Orrible.'

Between those who drew conviction from the atmosphere and those, relatively few, who heard the first official confirmation over the radio, fell the majority. People who had to be in office or factory before 9.30, housewives who didn't have the wireless on that morning; solitary workers, dwellers in self-contained flats and in houses where the day's routine did not for hours bring them in touch with others who had heard. Many had heard the 8 o'clock bulletin giving the German announcement. But many more had not troubled to tune in. Expectation had long passed its peak. The air offensive had worked up to a crescendo and stayed there. News of 1,000-plane raids had become so familiar that people were not bothering much with the news of the day. Mass-Observation street surveys show that 30-40 per cent of those questioned between mid-morning and late afternoon in the preceding weeks had not heard or read the day's news. In contrast, daily street surveys in May 1940, showed an average of 7 per cent 'not-heards'. News in May 1944 was monotonously momentous; people knew what to expect; the overnight destruction of a city was 'nothing new'. As a young housewife, queueing for the evening paper at 4.35 on D-Day said:

'No, I don't usually buy one. Not me. Sometimes I might look at the headlines of the evening paper my husband brings in with him, but it's been the same tripe for weeks. But this is different. We've been waiting for this to happen for a long time.'



Or another young woman, confronted with the news for the first time at three o’clock, after a day indoors:

‘Have you heard the news?’

‘What? The Fall of Rome? Good, isn’t it.’

‘No, the Second Front’s started.’

‘WHAT? I’ve listened to every news for the past few weeks and to all the bulletins on the Forces Programme. I got so tired of waiting for it to happen—I didn’t bother to listen today.’

Then there was the growing feeling that the invasion was bluff, accentuated rather than lessened by the fall of Rome:

‘I could hardly believe it, all day. I felt it couldn’t be true—it’s been hanging about so long, I thought it was never coming off.’

These factors contributed to the slow penetration of the news, the scepticism with which second-hand reports were often received, silent eagerness to see it in black and white before passing comment.

Naturally, those who knew tended to suppose that others knew too, with the result that many people first heard through a chance conversation at work, in street or bus, shop or train. The frequency with which the penny failed at first to drop shows how far the possibility of invasion often was from immediate expectations. This is how a woman factory worker heard, told in the evening at a Cricklewood pub:

‘I couldn’t make out what was wrong this morning. A woman near me says “We’re moving!” I says, “Are you? Where to?” and she looks at me queer as if I was soft and says, “I’M NOT MOVING—WE ARE”. Well, I thought she was proper silly, and then she turns to me and says, “Haven’t you heard? It’s the invasion what’s moving. We’ve begun.”’

Initial verbal reactions were brief and deep; obvious signs of excitement rare. A 55-year-old mother whose eldest son was assumed to have gone with the first assault wave described her feelings (10 a.m.):

‘I was just going off to my job—I got a new job you know, up at the King’s Arms—I was just starting off, and I thought I’d just pop in at the dairy and get the girl to save me a drop of milk, because they don’t give us no milk with our tea up at the King’s Arms, we have to bring it if we want it. I think it’s mean, they’re a catering place aren’t they, you’d have thought they could have spared a drop of milk for the cleaners, wouldn’t you, out of all the lot they get in—I’ve seen it coming, great cans of it. So I popped in the dairy, and the girl she says to me “Have you heard, ma?” “Heard?” I says, “Heard what?” “Why”, she says, “the invasion’s started.” “Go on!” I says, “you’re kidding

me." "No," she says, "no I'm not. It was on the wireless. At eight o'clock they said that our barges, the invasion barges, they'd all landed up the river somewhere, somewhere in France, and there was tremendous fighting going on over there." "Oh," I said, "Oh, my Lord." That's all I could say; just stood there and couldn't say anything. I thought to myself: Well I'm glad it's started, we've had enough hanging about. But I can't get it out of my mind, all them poor devils, thousands and thousands of them. And my Henry's out there with them—at least he will be damn soon, he'll be going across with the tanks. Oh; my Lord, I hope it will be all right, all those poor boys.'

From the offices of an R.A. Depot comes the following report:

'At 10.00 hours, one of the H.Q. clerks, who had a radio in his room, came in rather diffidently and said, "I suppose you know the invasion's official? They've just put out Eisenhower's communiqué No. 1—landings in France. All the way from Normandy to Holland." Everyone in my office was working hard, and the reception of this news couldn't have been less impressive. The clerk withdrew, rather damped by our calm. It wasn't till after he had gone that I began to think of what he had said. I thought: Could be—it sounded somehow reasonable. However, the correct reaction would appear to be studious calm and keep on working—which I did.'

The quietness, lack of immediate apparent emotion or excitement, was one of the most vivid evening memories of D-Day. Partly, perhaps, because people had lived over the moment often in the past, expected things to be abnormal, and in an undefined way different from any ordinary day. Largely because feelings simply did not get translated into words. The visible, audible aspect of human reaction on 6 June was certainly inadequate. It nettled a few, who saw in monosyllabic comment and a continuation of the job in hand signs of callousness or indifference. This young office worker, for instance:

'They've got ten miles inland now—bless them!—but nobody seems to care. I've been having rows with people all day over it. They're so callous—take it just as a matter of course. We were having rolls and coffee in the office when someone came in and said, "The invasion has started!" Do you know, they just said, "Oh!"—and went on eating their rolls. There. What do you think of that? I wanted to shout at them all. Think of those lads out there—on the beaches. But they don't take any notice...'

Mass-Observation reports of behaviour and talk in London that day all agree about the extraordinary silence. The crisis knots of discussion and argument at street corners, in bars and cafés, did not form on D-Day. Even the newspaper queues were quiet.

Coming home from work in the evening a mother remarked to her daughter-in-law:

'I'm glad to be in again, really I am. I don't like it, you know, it's kind of

funny out in the road. When I went out dinner time there wasn’t a soul anywhere; it was all very quiet; you could hear a pin drop in the High Road. I was quite scared walking along, I could hear my feet all along the street and not a soul in sight. I suppose they were all listening to the wireless.’

That was how it struck people; unexpectedly and rather frighteningly quiet. Superficially, conversation and behaviour seemed so much like any other day that it was difficult for any one person to summarize the day’s mood. One report concludes:

‘It is difficult to know how to sum up. It is certain that people were interested in the invasion. But they didn’t show it much. They were tense and they were curious. They were expectant and waiting. But if someone had dropped from the Moon, unable to read and not knowing the invasion had started, they wouldn’t have known this was invasion day.’

Another summarizes:

‘On the morning of D-Day there was a feeling of excitement which immediately gave place to seriousness and a deathly silence. Quite a few women thought “it was terrible, but it was to be expected”, a few feared reprisals on us by way of air-raids, but the majority were just quietly waiting for news before they would discuss it. They carried on with their usual daily routine. The only difference was the quietness everywhere—even shopping wasn’t discussed; and also there were as many women as men queueing for papers. These queues were silent, too, and as each one had his paper he walked a little distance away from the rest to study it before moving on.’

From all these reports and hour-by-hour observations a general picture emerges of what was going on below the surface of talk and behaviour. At first people were excited but sceptical. Here is a personal report from a housewife living in the suburbs of London:

‘8.8 a.m. I switch on the wireless. The announcer is saying: “... and to end the news bulletin here are the headlines again . . . German overseas news agency claim that Allied airborne troops have made landings at several points along the French coast . . .” We don’t seem to hear the rest of the news. The children excitedly exclaim: “Daddy, the Second Front’s started”. Daddy rushes downstairs, fumbles with the wireless knob and turns to me: “Did we invade? No jokes. You’re kidding.”

‘The family sit down to breakfast, but are too excited to eat. We have an urge to rush all over the place, and to go knocking at neighbour’s doors to find out whether invasion *has* started.

‘8.40 a.m. I go to the front door. The next-door neighbour sweeping the pathway says:

“I think it *is* true. It was on the eight o’clock news, although I thought the announcer gave it out in a strange way, sandwiched in between the other news as if he wasn’t quite certain himself.”

'9.5 a.m. The baker says:

"I haven't heard it myself, but there's a proper commotion in the road—everybody's wondering if it *has* started. Most of them think it has. But we've only got to go by what the German wireless give out—ours didn't confirm it. They say we've landed at Le Havre and other places."

'9.35 a.m. Walking to the main road, I meet several friends. Eagerly they question me if the news is true or not, and seem disinclined to believe when I say I don't know. Asked if they're pleased: "In a way, yes, but I seem to want to cry more than anything else". Boarding a bus, I observe passengers reading their morning papers as usual. Only one conversation, relating to the fall of Rome as a "smart piece of work" was overheard. Nothing about invasion. On the surface everything looks normal—just another busload off to work. . . .

Among friends and acquaintances, people admitted this first feeling of elation:

'I've never been so excited in my life—when I first heard it I wanted to rush out and tell everybody.' (Middle Class Woman, 50.)

But that phase passed quickly. Implications rapidly became clear. Two accounts from very different environments. An office:

'Funnily enough I didn't hear the news until I reached the office, and the girls were full of it. Mr. X. brought the wireless out from his private office into the general and switched it on for us all to hear. That was at ten. We were all very excited for the first half-hour, but I suppose that's the reaction of being bottled up for so long, wondering if it would take place. But people aren't really happy in the sense we know of being happy, they're frightfully worried. Nearly everyone's got someone they love in it.'

From a cattle market:

'When the news first got round the Cattle Market that invasion had begun, there was great excitement. The slaughtermen started betting how long the war would last. When the newsboy passed there was a rush for papers. I saw about a dozen looking over one copy, and the last I saw of it it was almost in tatters. There's no doubt everybody was excited, and you can take it from me they were getting very phlegmatic as regards the war. The only reason they've been buying the paper lately is to follow the racing news. They tell you that themselves, that it's the only thing in the paper that ever changes. They were all very optimistic, but after they'd heard the 12 o'clock news conversation took a more serious turn—they'd had time to reflect on the gravity of the position.'

Overt excitement lasted only for a short while and seems to have been confined to the familiar group, at home, in office or factory. There were certainly no signs of it in public places. After that, general feeling is well summed up by an old woman who said:



‘Yes, dear, it’s sad but it’s good. It’s the beginning of the end perhaps. It’s sad but it’s good.’

Other comments overheard that morning suggested neither over-optimism nor elation:

‘Serious, ain’t it? Enough to worry the life out of yer.’

‘We’ll win all right, but we’ll have to pay for it. We’ll get bombed again and our boys’ll get killed.’

‘It’s a shame. I hate to think of it. All those fine young fellows being mown down. The pick of our boys, and there’s more waiting in reserve. I can’t help feeling depressed.’

‘Yes, I think it’s true all right. We’ve been expecting it I know, but it gives you a funny feeling all the same, doesn’t it. To think of all our boys out there now.’

For many the mid-day radio bulletin or paper was the first they had seen or heard at first hand. Here is the scene outside a wireless retailer’s in a busy suburban street at 12 o’clock:

‘A crowd collects in the entrance of the wireless shop. As Big Ben strikes twelve the crowd, hitherto loosely knit, closes in.

‘The crowd are all keyed up with excitement, the tension is terrific. Men puff away at their pipes; women stand with bowed heads, and even the children, sensing the importance of the occasion, keep an uncanny silence.

‘Throughout the news the crowd listen tensely and eagerly, looking very solemn and anxious. The news over, they disperse quickly. Only a very few hang around, mostly women. One says:

“‘Well, it’s started. I never thought we would invade. I thought it was one piece of bluff. And now it’s here, the only way to look at the ghastly thing is that it will bring the end nearer. But it’s just cold-blooded murder all the same.”’

It was not until the papers arrived that people began to talk, and then about the behaviour of those who tried to get papers without queuing, not about the news. Though a few stayed a minute or so to glance at the headlines, not a single comment was heard.

Newspapermen kept back papers for their regular customers:

‘They’re for me reglers. Them that bought noospapers when there weren’t no noos in them.’

This caused irritation, too. Added up, the small symptoms of inward tension show how people were really feeling below the surface of reserved quietness. A Red Cross flag seller said she found people very short with her on D-Day, and hadn’t taken as much as on previous occasions on that beat. Women felt

they couldn't manage lunch that afternoon. A young typist apologized for poor work:

'I do hope you won't mind, I've typed your stuff very badly. I just didn't know what I was doing—I felt sick—but there, I wasn't the only one—three others in the room said they felt sick too.'

Among civilian men a tendency to wish they were taking a more active part:

'I've tried to get out of my job in Civvy Street all ways. Even ruptured my bloody self. I'd rather be with my brother over there.'

And several complaints of diarrhoea. All these small pointers show the deep feelings which lay hidden on D-Day. It was a tiring and disorganizing day, but to see how inner excitement and anxiety expressed itself it is necessary to go inside the family circle where people acted as they felt, and said some of what they thought, on 6 June. Here, abbreviated to essentials, is an account at various points of time of the home of Mr. and Mrs. P. He is 65, a hospital porter, she 55, a charwoman. The eldest son has been in Italy and North Africa. He is back in England and is expected to go on the invasion. His wife and her little girl of two lives with them, and they have two other children of their own, twins—a boy and girl of fourteen. We enter the flat at 10.30 and sit down with Mrs. P. in the kitchen. She looks at the breakfast things and says:

'It's no good. I can't get on with a thing this morning. When the girl told me I thought, well I can't go in to work this morning, I'm going back home to get things straight. And then I thought: no, I won't, I'll go to work and see what they're all saying there. So I went and did my hour up there. All the women were ever so excited. Poor Mrs. J., she's terrible upset, her boys will both be in it.'

She gets up and puts the kettle on for tea:

'Young Betty won't half give me a telling off when she comes in. She said we weren't to make no more tea till dinner time, or it won't last the week. But I can't help it; you've got to have a cup of tea, a day like this.'

We sit and drink tea. Presently she says:

'You know, I wasn't really surprised. I was kind of expecting something. We had a letter from Henry on the Thursday, and he said in it: "Don't worry, Ma, if you don't hear from me for some time after this. It'll be all right. Just you cross your fingers for me and don't worry. I've got P . . . luck." So I thought then, something's up, or he wouldn't write like that. I was expecting it at the week-end really . . .'

A little later Betty, the daughter-in-law, comes in with the baby. She describes the tremendous queues for the first mid-day papers:

‘Poor little Jeannie, she was terribly disappointed, she couldn’t buy the paper . . . But I couldn’t let her do it this time, with all that queue waiting, she wouldn’t never have got there. What a mess the place is in, Ma, you haven’t washed up nor nothing.’

‘Well, I can’t help it. I can’t seem to get on with it.’

Switch forward to 4 p.m., when daughter and grand-daughter come home from their afternoon walk. Betty:

‘I got quite a fright while I was out. You know those planes we saw this morning, the Flying Fortresses? Well, I was just up the road, when I saw them coming back, the same ones, just the way they’d gone. So I stopped and counted them and there was only thirty-four. There was fifty-four this morning. I thought, Oh dear, that’s terrible. They’ve lost twenty—what a lot to lose. Then all of a sudden I saw another lot coming up behind them, and I counted them, and what do you think—there were 20. So they hadn’t lost a single one. I was so bucked I could have jumped up and down in the middle of the road.’

Mrs. P. rejoins:

‘Yes, I reckon they’re doing lovely. A woman at work told me we’ve got ever such a distance inland. Oh, and she said—well, I was saying to her, did you know, I said, Hitler’s up in Northern France with them? And she said, Hitler? she said, why Hitler’s been dead for weeks. It’s his double up there now. I wouldn’t be surprised either, he’s been quiet as anything for such a time.’

The younger daughter arrives home from school. She complains that they’ve only let the girls listen to the one o’clock news at school. She’d expected the classes to stop, but everything has gone on as usual.

“‘I should think so,” says her elder sister. “They don’t want kids like you hanging around the radio all day; it’s nothing to do with you. Anyway, what you want to for? I’m about fed up with it, no one’s said a word about anything but invasion all day. I think anyone who says any more about invasion should pay a penny. I’ve heard enough of it.””

But a minute later she herself is saying, as she takes the baby on her lap:

‘Isn’t it wonderful to think our babies will grow up in peace. They won’t know anything about all this; it’ll be over soon now, and they won’t know anything about it.’

Towards six they put the wireless on. When the news starts, everyone sits in complete silence while the invasion news is on. Afterwards Mrs. P. comments:

'Poor little devils. It's wicked, all them poor little devils. Please God it'll soon be over.'

The boy twin by this time is back from school. He chips in:

'I think it'll take a devil of a long time. And there'll be millions of casualties.'

'You shut up, Jim, that's a way to talk, with your own brother out there.'

'Well, I can't help it, Ma. I'm only saying what I think'll happen. I can't help it.'

'You don't have to talk like that about it.'

'Poor Ma, don't you get all of a jitter, the way you did when Henry first went away. Ma was awful, every time she heard a step outside in the street she'd rush to the window to see if it was the telegraph boy.'

'You be quiet, Jim. Why don't you go round and get those boots off Mr. F.: You said you was going this evening.'

'All right, Ma, don't get so excited.'

They turn the wireless full on to a programme of dance music.

That is just one of a million families in similar circumstances; with a relative who might have gone on D-Day, whose possible departure the invasion anyway brought nearer. Outside the bounds of home and familiar group, people expressed their feelings seldom or not at all, speculated less than during any other period of crisis. That was probably because their feelings were too complicated for expression, and speculation seemed too trivial a way of meeting the situation. Only at the end of the day a chance remark showed what had been going on beneath the quiet superficial calm. Though the King's call to prayer often met with indifference, the urge to something like prayer was inarticulately there. In a pub where no-one had listened to the radio speech, and where no-one had stood for the National Anthem, a working-class woman commented:

'I've felt washed out all day. I think it's the strain waiting for it to start. I haven't been able to settle down to anything today, wondering how those poor boys are. I sort of want to pray for them—and I can't say I'm a church-woman—but I feel we should pray for the Lord's help.'

MASS-OBSERVATION is an independent organization engaged in investigating the way in which ordinary people think and behave. It is run by Tom Harrison and H. D. Willcock from 21 Bloomsbury Street, W.C.1 (Museum 6811), with separate Panel offices at P.B.6, Letchworth, Herts. Anyone can help with the panel side of its work, and more help is always welcome. A postcard to the Letchworth office will bring full details.

J. M. COHEN

## THE POETRY OF BORIS PASTERNAK

BORIS PASTERNAK's early leanings were toward painting. The son of a painter of repute who had painted Tolstoy's portrait, a painter he remained even though his education at Moscow and later at Marburg was academic; but the medium that he chose was poetry.

Born in 1890, he first saw the shape of things to come as a schoolboy when he witnessed the 1905 outbreak at St. Petersburg. He studied; he travelled; he worked at an art school and studied music under Scriabin. But the war and the revolution were to interrupt his development into a cultivated man of letters. His early verse is slight, in contrast to the solemn poetry of the time, but a very early lyric, written in 1912, reveals already several characteristics of his mature style.

The sleepy garden scatters beetles  
like bronze cinders from chafing pans.  
Level with me and with my candle  
the multicoloured worlds hang down.

And as to some unheard of secret  
I step across into that night  
where damp in its decay the poplar  
covers the edges of the moon.

A pond there's like a revealed secret,  
there whispers surf of apple trees,  
the garden hangs, a house on piles, there  
and holds in front of it the sky.

A pleasant enough little lyric written in regular rhymed verses, though slight liberties are taken with the rhymes, sad (garden) rhyming with visiát (hang) and the feminine táina (secret) with sváynoy (on piles), a licence already taken by Blok and his contemporaries. But this differs from the conventional impressionist lyric written in most countries after Verlaine; it has two

marks of individuality. The detail is visualized with a painter's eye, with an eye trained in the impressionist school to see not objects, but the space before the eye in which objects and their surroundings mingle in light, shape and colour, before separating into their individual forms. With a painter's eye Pasternak sees the garden suspended like a building on piles, foliage supported by the stems of the trees; the beetles are seen as if for the first time and an unexpected comparison made, a comparison based on visual similarity, the germ of the provocative image that is the hallmark of his later style and the second characteristic that looks forward to his maturity. This poem is one of many written before 1916; among them are pieces as individual and delicately visualized as *Wintry Sky*, a skating scene in which Pasternak renders a landscape with less conventional touches than in the garden poem.

In other poems he develops this characteristic simile, the Pasternakian conceit, based sometimes like the seventeenth-century conceit on a mental comparison rather than a visual. In the last of a series of poems on St. Petersburg occur two images that show the strength and weakness of this device.

'The streets strive like thought towards the port  
like a dark stream of manifestos.'

Here the bird's eye view of the streets hung with banners and posters is well conveyed. The second simile is more violent. Addressing the city he says:

'You do not hold back with your piles the waves' inundations.  
Their talk is like the hands of blind midwives.'

One is reminded of the talk of the laundresses in 'Finnegan's Wake', but the strain on the reader of tracing two comparisons and placing them side by side is severe. The sound of the waves is compared to the chatter of the midwives, their blind probing of the land to the groping of the midwives' hands.

Cutting across Pasternak's development in these years came the Futurist movement with its violence, its manifestos and its deliberate formlessness. There was not much that he could learn from Khlebnikov's naïve rejoicing in horror nor from Mayakovsky's brazen shout, but the movement releases two more components of the poet's character, his rejoicing in violence and his provocativeness. His first important book *My Sister*,



*Life*, containing poems written in and before 1917, fully reveals both these features, though perhaps the provocative image is at its most vivid rather earlier, in the sequence *Spring*. A prose translation shows the style at its most outrageous.

'The wood is throttled with a knot of feathered throats,  
like a buffalo with a lasso and moans in the nets, as in sonatas  
the steel gladiator of the organ groans.'

'Poetry, be a Grecian sponge with suckers and among the  
sticky green I will put you down on the wet board of a green  
garden seat.'

'Grow a fine frill and farthingale, soak up cloud and ravines  
and at night I will wring you out for the good of greedy paper.'

*My Sister*, *Life* contains little as perverse as this, but there is a deliberate attempt to make the reader sit up, to shock him into seeing with the poet's eyes.

At the same time the impressionism gives way to expressionism. The landscape is in movement:

'And then the summer said goodbye  
to the station. Taking off its cap,  
at night for souvenirs the thunder  
took a hundred blinding snaps,'

he says in *Thunder*, momentarily instantaneous.

The book is uneven and its standards of taste most uncertain. It contains lyrics of appalling saccharinity, though of perfect craftsmanship, and others in which romantic violence stops short and as violently laughs at itself.

The Kerensky revolution is celebrated in a poem of crude imagery, *Spring Rain*, which concludes:

'It's not the night nor rain nor the peoples' rending choruses  
Kerensky! hurrah!

It's the blinding march from catacombs, that had no issue  
yesterday  
to the great forum.

It's not roses, it's not mouths, nor the murmur of the crowd;  
It's before this theatre, here,  
that the surge of night is rising over Europe and her pride  
is breaking on our streets.

But this acceptance of revolution is not the prelude to political

C

adherence. Characteristically the poem occurs in a section of the book with the sub-title *Distractions for the beloved*.

His own attitude to political change is shown in the romantic pose of the poem *About these verses*, in which he sets out the subject matter of his poems.

'Muffled, my hand before my eyes  
down from the window I shall call:  
"Children, what century is it  
that's down in our courtyard, my dears?"'

'Who's cleared a pathway to the door  
to that hole that's filled up with sleet,  
whilst I was smoking with Lord Byron,  
drinking with Edgar Allan Poe?'

The book is full of a theatrical swagger at its most pronounced when Pasternak is attacking the bourgeois, as in the first poem of the series *Postscript: Darling, it's frightening*. He sees himself as another Lermontov, to whose memory he dedicates the book, but there is a good deal of excuse for those who dismissed him as deliberately obscure and provocative and accused him of flouting all traditional standards, Lermontov's among them. But there are in the book several poems of real beauty. The two pieces in the section, *Songs in letters, to save her from boredom*, have a pleasantly personal note of love in a country cottage, a week-end simplicity that contrasts pleasantly with the week-day exuberance of much of the book. Both show Pasternak's most constant and most individual quality, a revelling in life and in the small things of life, in nature and the small, entrancing glimpses of her that are vouchsafed to the innocent eye, the eye free of pre-conception and clichés. Lines like these from *Vorobyev Hills* are of the poet's best:

Here the town tram stops; the rails are laid no further.  
Beyond, the pines will serve. Beyond, they cannot run.  
Beyond there's only Sunday. Plucking down the branches,  
the glade goes running onward, slipping through the grass.

Another genuine note is struck in the petulant gloom of *Cape Mootch*, in which the landscape is coloured by a love affair gone wrong, and the lightness of *English Lessons* with its cryptic ending shows that the poet can bring off lyrics that are charming in an individual vein yet with a reminiscence of Laforgue.

The technical innovations that were marked in the first poem quoted were continued and more variations of half rhymes, both consonantal and vowel, invented. The only test of validity seems to be the spoken word. Russian is a strongly accented language and the vowels lose their full value progressively as they lie further from the accentuated syllable; consequently his feminine and three syllable rhymes look strange on the page, but are effective when the poem is read. His metres are various and occasionally the length of line is varied in the course of a poem; but a sound instinct and real technical mastery save the poet from the sprawling *vers libre* of his contemporaries and his innovations, like Browning's rhymes, rather help than hinder the vigour of his expression.

The next book, containing poems written from 1917 onwards, bears the title of its most ambitious poem, *Theme and Variations*, an attempt rather deliberately to compose after a musical pattern. The motives are stated in the theme, and repeated in the variations, one of which, the third, is Pasternak's most common anthology piece—'The stars rushed headlong by', a romantic statement, high sounding, highly coloured and obscure, ending characteristically in self-irony.

A small wind from Morocco stirred the sea  
The simoon blew. In snows Archangel snored.  
The candles guttered. Rough draft of 'the Prophet'  
dried and the morning dawned above the Ganges.

It was the romantic poet of 'The Prophet', Pasternak's other self, that conceived the idea of this ambitious poem, but the poet's approach to music was academic, to painting natural and it is to the landscapes of the section entitled *The Tireless Garden* that one turns for his best work.

The revolution had come, but the revolutionary poet of *My sister, life* was less provocative; and it is a real proof of his integrity that he could write in 1917 two pieces of pure and exact vision, *The Hazel Grove* and *In the Wood*, and in 1918 a piece of violent regret for the coming of winter to the pleasant country house, 'Spasskoye'—was it in a sense for the coming of revolution to break up the carefree week-end life of *Vorobyev Hills*? But if these poems are remarkable for feelings more subtle and genuine, they are even more remarkable for the clarity of the painter's eye. He was not escaping from the revolution into a

country refuge: there was none. Yet was not the drawing of the country more careful for the threat to the existence of that kind of life?

But in those years Pasternak greeted the new age with optimism. Two poems, one for the new year, *January 1919*, the other *Will be*, a jaunty piece of affirmation with the refrain 'Thus, even thus will life be new' look forward and the last has an oblique reference to the revolution:

'Boss us then, while the handkerchief's  
still fluttering, you're the lady yet,  
while we remain in darkness still  
and while the fire is not blown out.'

But it is a very personal symbolism that identifies the old régime with a lady imperiously fluttering her handkerchief, nor can Pasternak sufficiently pervert his own cultured background to identify himself with those who in a more real sense were in the darkness. The fire is the spark of a bullet wad and for the second of its flight the old régime might keep its power. It is only the date 1919 that makes us seek this explanation; in another year the poem's source might have seemed a purely personal anecdote.

Two other themes come into Pasternak's poetry in this volume. Regret for childhood lost, for childish innocence perverted in the section *I can forget them* gives rise to a spiritual autobiography rather more objective than the theatrical posturing of the earlier poetry.

'What does the siren on the bench  
mean by the menace of her beauty,  
'if stealing children's not allowed?  
So there arise the first suspicions.  
  
So terrors ripen. Can he let  
a star surpass him in achievement,  
when he's a Faust, he's an enchanter?  
And so the gipsy ways begin.'

In this poem too Pasternak broaches the second fresh theme; he begins to analyse the nature and the functions of a poet, both obvious enough in the days of the pontifical symbolists, but now like much else to be questioned. His solution of the problem varies from poem to poem; in the piece just quoted the poetry arises from the terror, but by 1922 in two poems he stresses the automatic nature of his inspiration:

'Images fly askew in showers,  
gather themselves from hinge, from wall  
and high road that's blown out the candle—  
and fall in rhythm. I don't stop them.

In another piece, *Poetry*, written in the same year, the answer is more aggressive and more cynical:

Poetry, when once an empty truism,  
like a zinc bucket's at the tap,  
then, only then it's sure to flow.  
The copy book's spread open—spout!

The poet's place in society had been dwelt on before Pasternak's first dramatic piece *Shakespeare*, in which the poet, a Villon figure, is taken to task by his own sonnet, which confronts him on the morning after a 'thick' night in an inn and attacks him for demeaning himself to win 'billiard-room popularity'. The poet, with a sound instinct, sends his sonnet packing. This piece deals summarily with the theory of art for art's sake. In its deliberate anachronism it compares with Mayakovsky's *Christopher Columbus*. Pasternak did not believe in the 'ivory tower', though he wavers between the attitude suggested by the last three quotations and the claim that he makes for Balzac in a later poem, when he describes him as 'weaving a requiem service for Paris'. On the whole he is content like Kästner to own *eine kleine Versfabrik* in which he converts experience or nature into poetry 'for the benefit of greedy paper'. A training in philosophy at Marburg may have made him distrust dogmatism.

In contrast to the first book, *Theme and Variations* is smoother in texture; the violent images are on the whole less arbitrary and, particularly in the beautiful poem *In the Wood*, much more fully worked out. These two books were published in the early days of the revolution, when, under the guidance of Lunacharsky, communists were proud to support and read advanced literature, but by 1921 this era was over, and the writer was required to show his adherence to the working class by writing works of a propagandist kind. For most of the poets of the day, for Anna Akhmatova and for Mandelstam, this was the end. They had written for a cultured audience that was no more, and the newly risen proletariat couldn't understand their work. But Pasternak was in a different position for he strongly believed that he

belonged to Russia and accepted the revolution, as is clear from the poem *We're few*. It was consequently not difficult for him to produce a set of poems, '1905', based on his schoolboy reminiscences of that outbreak. Technically he could do anything that Mayakovsky could and this staccato sequence, printed some years ago in *New Writing* in an English version by Alec Brown, is no less turgid, but considerably more obscure in its images and considerably more personal than other work of this kind. Another sequence, *Lieutenant Schmidt*, deals with a hero of that revolution in a series of lyrics perhaps more individual but hardly more interesting. These two works were written between 1925 and 1927, and they were followed by a fragmentary novel in verse, *Spektorsky*, smoother and much closer to the traditional style than anything he had so far written and, in part at least, autobiographical. But during these years Pasternak's output of lyrical poetry was small, though the few pieces included under the title of *Miscellaneous poems* dating from that year are of his best. Two, *The Cocks* and *Lyubka*, are among the most beautiful of his landscapes; and, true to the ambivalence of the poet, the first is a poem that greets the new world and its promise of change, while the second regrets the passing of the old. In the first he writes of the cocks:

Examining each several year by name,  
each in his turn, they call upon the dark  
and so begin their prophecy of change  
in rain, in earth, in love, in all, in all.'

In the second, after describing a shower, the shower that occurs so often, each time with surprising freshness, in his poems, he presents in four lines a vignette that contains regret for a whole age, the age of Turgenev.

They're drinking evening tea in country houses,  
the mist swells the mosquito's sail and night,  
jungling with sudden music of guitars,  
stands in a milky darkness mid the cow-wheat.

These years were, however, hardly justified by a few lyrics, even though these were richer and smoother than any except the best: *Vorobyev Hills*, *In the Wood*, and *Spasskoye*. The poet's vigour, the images which had come to him in showers, the subjects for poetry, were growing less, and if we can blame the



bleak background of socialist construction and its tight censorship on ideas in part, we must attribute the situation in part also to the poet's failure to look inwards. The poems were all the work of a young man, exuberant, bold, self dramatizing, a young man of amazing virtuosity, whose mastery of his own medium grew steadily and whose work had improved with the greater restraint he had displayed in his second book. He was capable of turning out the poetic journalism that the Soviet expected of him because he was in sympathy with the Soviet achievement. But he was not capable of any great advance as a poet. Unless he could recapture his own youthful feelings, Pasternak at the age of forty was not likely to write more than a little more genuine poetry, and it is to such a reconquest of his old powers that we owe his next book of poems, *Second Birth* (1932). From this book we learn the occasion of the miracle; it seems that he fell in love with a girl much younger than himself. His love lyrics for her are far tenderer than those in the early books, and the poet has now a charm that he rarely had as a young man.

The Pasternakian image had lost none of its element of surprise; on the first page we find the print of the waves on the beach compared with waffles, and the two ballads also contain a good deal of obscurity despite their simple form. But the poet's style is now less angular, though none the less individual. The painter's eye is as keen as ever, particularly in the two poems that give a meticulous description of a journey in the Caucasus and in the impressionist *Darkness of Death*.

Never has he given such pictures as those of the Caucasus in the true romantic tradition.

Afar where clouds in rings were coiling  
like serpents on their eggs, more dread  
than forays of the long dead Tartars,  
a range of Chinese shadows spread.

A row of gravestones on a backcloth  
of paths, they were, blocked up by snow,  
beyond the scenery of those skies, where  
Prometheus languished, ceased to glow.

The love poems have a naïve and tempestuous flow that is pure delight and even a rather touching humility. For the first time the poet reveals his heart, and it is the heart of a young man.

O, how bold she was, when hardly  
gone from her beloved mother's  
wing, in jest she gave her childish  
laugh to me and, never offering  
opposition or impediment,  
her childish peace and childish laugh,  
her concerns and cares, a child  
innocent of injury.

And rather wistfully he hopes to recapture in himself a childish  
directness that has been long overlaid with self-consciousness.  
The responsibility of love weighs upon him and he sighs:

Lightly to waken, see again,  
shake from the heart its wordy letter  
and live in future days unsoiled.  
Surely all that needs no great cunning.

But though the keynote of *Second Birth* is the return of youth,  
other notes creep in, and the old optimism about the good times  
that the revolution will bring is tempered by irony and by the  
feeling that he may not survive to see them:

In time to come, I tell them, we'll be equal  
to any living now. If cripples, then  
no matter we shall just have been run over  
by 'New Man' in the waggon of his Plan.  
And when from death the tablet doesn't save us,  
then time will hurry on more freely still  
to that far point where Five Year Plan the second  
prolongs the dissertations of the soul.

But most revealing of all that the shades of the prison house  
are closing is the little poem: 'O had I known, that's how it  
happens'. Here old age, first stressed in *Vorobyev Hills* as a spur  
to enjoyment of the week-end life, now for the first time applies  
to himself, the old actor who had been prepared to stake so little  
when he made his stage debut:

But old age is like Rome, demands  
instead of wisecracks and of tricks,  
actors must give not easy readings  
but death outright in sober earnest.

And when the heart dictates the line  
 it sends a slave upon the stage  
 and there's an end of art and there's  
 a breath of earth and destiny.

Though not the last in published sequence, this poem must be thought of as the last in the collected volume, which contains no poems written after *Second Birth*.

In the last years Pasternak has translated poetry from the Georgian, and is now engaged in translating Shakespeare. It has been suggested that the Soviet government, disapproving of his personal lyrics has directed him to this work, but after reading *Second Birth* one must doubt whether he had much more lyrical poetry to write.

By turning to translation it may be that he is saving himself from the fate of many poets who have spent the second half of their lives repeating their early work in vain attempts to relive the experience that made it real. It is given to few contemporary poets, to few indeed in any age, to deepen and widen their early inspiration in middle age, and nothing in *Second Birth* suggests that Pasternak is among those few.

In his later work his æstheticism has grown more clear-sighted, his dramatizations less violent and less perverse; technically his poetry has shed some of its most flamboyant features and its quick transitions from one image to another, each more surprising than the last, that destroyed the unity of many poems in *My sister, life*. With age some of the pungency that must have won him young admirers is toned down, but there remains a prodigious talent that has added twenty or thirty fine poems to Russian literature, that has been able to write the poems that were required of him during the Soviet government's first 'Gleichschaltung', that must be capable of translating some of Shakespeare as well as it has ever been translated; for Pasternak's tremendous inventiveness, his enormous vocabulary and his vigour are admirably suited to the work of translation.

There remains the task of placing Pasternak in the contemporary scene, of suggesting the relationship of his poetry to that of others. To Blok, the master of his young days and one of Russia's greatest poets, he owes little. Only to read Blok's few

poems about the war of 1914, those addressed to his native land and his poem about the Revolution, 'The Twelve', is to see the contrast between the poet of spiritual values, aloof yet sensitive to the cataclysm of his days, and the aesthete who sees the world in all its manifold aspects, makes an artist's choice among them, but fails to establish a stable sense of values, though he never surrenders to the ready-made values of the revolution.

There is little to connect Pasternak with the symbolists; his affinities are with the brood of Laforgue rather than with them. His natural settings of the steppe and snow, his distances and his wide horizons he shares with the Russian poets, but he takes over from the west, from Verlaine and from George and the German romantics, the haunted landscape that is foreign to all Russian poets except Tyutchev. Like Laforgue he is essentially a would-be romantic, brought up short by the unlikeness of the actual world to the highly-coloured world with its simple values that the romantics, Lermontov or Lenau, drew. But the actual world, far from revolting him, attracts him: to him because of his painter's eye it has an even greater beauty. The third variation, quoted earlier in this article, shows only one aspect of the poet's ambivalence, one closely related to T. S. Eliot's in the Sweeney poems. The real dualism in Pasternak's mind is not Laforgue's and not Eliot's; the world attracts him too much and robs his experience of vital core; instead there is a vague melancholy and unease of the man of action forced to reflect, the occasional thought of how it will all look afterwards that comes increasingly into such later poems as that beginning 'Some day in years to come they'll play me Brahms' and into the last lines of *Lyubka*:

Then everything is scented with night violet:  
the years and faces. Thoughts. And each event  
that may perhaps be rescued from the past  
and taken in the future from fate's hands.

Occasionally, even in *My sister, life*, he is overwhelmed with the sadness of things, and we see what lies below the surface of buoyant optimism, below his truculent challenge of the bourgeois values in everything including art. In *The Definition of the creative power*, as in the poems that lament the loss of childish innocence, we see that the art really emerges from the terror:

Gardens, ponds, palings, the creation,  
foamed with purity of tears,  
are only categories of passion  
hoarded by the human heart.

He remains in the 'Waste land', but the desert smiles on him; only occasionally does its vegetation fail to attract. Hence a poetic growth into the second half of life fails to take place. Pasternak's development did not lead him into a clear realization of the Waste Land position nor through it and out the other side. The world was too prone to spill beauty, yet the underlying melancholy serves to show that the poet was not convinced by it; he was only too readily attracted by the thunder, the rain and the revolution, all of which may strip off nature's covering and reveal its essence: but none of them does.

Perhaps a truer comparison is with Auden, with whom he shares his early success. Both as young men had marked out one manner as their own. It is as easy to recognize a poem by Pasternak as by Auden; both were victims of their own fatal facility, yet it is possible to foresee from Auden's continuous search for truth, even in so disappointing a poem as 'New Year's Letter', a possibility of future development. Pasternak looked for a second birth outside himself, and he found it for an instant that he records for us in his poems of 1932.

The weakness in the poetry is its subjectivity; apparently inspired more than most poets by external events, Pasternak is in fact never held by the world outside him. It is clear from his quick movement from one image to the next that his joy is feverish. His moods do not hold long. For that reason it is difficult to compare him to his great contemporaries, Eliot, Lorca, Alberti or Aragon, all of whom have moved on from one set of experiences to another and attained maturity. Pasternak's vital experiences were adolescent and adolescence pervades the poetry, giving it both its freshness and its violence, its changing moods and the underlying melancholy and fear, which emerge strongly from some of his very best poems; giving it also the gaiety and promise that emerge just as strongly from others.

Pasternak's strength lies in his absolute independence; an individualist in the midst of a totalitarian revolution he makes no

compromises. His acceptance of the revolution is best understood from the line:

Once We were people. Now we're epochs.

He is 'above the barriers' of politics; refusing to be interfered with, he stands honestly for the revolution, neither sacrificing himself to it like Mayakovsky nor going into exile and silence. He has been true to his own experience wherever it has led him.

PETER QUENNELL

## LAURENCE STERNE

### III

HIS first rush from death had carried Sterne as far as Paris. He arrived, in mid-January 1762, feverish and broken down after an exhausting journey, and was at once assured by the local doctors that he had not long to live. They did not count on the remarkable vitality of their patient's constitution. Within a few days he was up and visiting the French theatres (where he admired Clairon and Dumesnil, though he considered that the French stage could provide nothing 'which gives the nerves so smart a blow' as the great tragic personages portrayed by Garrick) and, within a few weeks, had stepped to the centre of the Parisian literary world, which recognized in him a wondrous and genial eccentric, representative of all those extraordinary English qualities that the restless taste of the period had then begun to value. He was as strange a phenomenon as Shakespeare, as eloquent and affecting, and far more polished! Sterne, with his usual versatility, seems very soon to have picked up the somewhat difficult knack of Gallic conversation; and, ranging freely to and fro in a society which included the Duc d'Orléans on the one hand, and farmers general and famous actresses upon the other, with Encyclopaedist *salons* as a convenient midway point, he put behind him the last vestiges of his parsonic and provincial youth.

Even the clerical gown, in which Reynolds had painted him, was temporarily discarded; and Carmontelle's water-colour, executed at the command of the Duc d'Orléans, shows him standing on the terrace of the Palais Royal, his back turned



toward the Invalides, clad in the complete apparatus of the contemporary *homme du monde*. Lace ruffles cover his exiguous wrists; one spidery hand is thrust deep into his breeches pocket; his thin body is enclosed in a black full-skirted coat. His right elbow supported on a brocaded arm-chair, he leans or lounges forward, alert and sharp-nosed, a faint smile contracting his parchment cheek and forming a long satiric wrinkle, furrowed from nose to chin. He looks easy, amused, reflective and (unlike the Sterne who appears in Reynolds' portrait) not at all satanic. The influence of French society on Sterne's character had been stirring and yet mollifying. At the age that he had now reached, though talents may still be improved, the temperament in which they are rooted very seldom changes; but no intelligent man could explore such a society and remain completely unaffected. For Sterne had arrived in Paris during one of the brightest and happiest moments of French or European culture. Paris was still the clearing-house of European intellect. Here, gathered together within the confines of a single city, were Diderot and d'Alembert, d'Holbach, Crebillon, Marmontel, Morellet—Voltaire and Rousseau were powerful but distant figures—flanked by women as remarkable, each in her separate sphere, as Madame du Deffand, Madame Geoffrin and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. It was a society that held a delicate balance between the pleasures of thinking and feeling. Rarely have men and women been more passionately addicted to thought, or more thoughtful in their passions; and Sterne, with his cult of emotion for the emotion's sake, his peculiarly deft mingling of sense and sentiment, his elaborate parades of feeling and sudden strident explosions of outrageous mockery, struck a note that reverberated on already responsive ears. Naturally, he 'played up'; for he had much of the comedian's gift—shedding public tears over the victims of the great fire at St. Germain, dropping to his knees before Henri Quatre's equestrian statue, and puzzling and interesting the guests at the Baron d'Holbach's table (where he had acquired a devoted admirer in a certain Jean Baptiste Suard) by a declaration that the Bible and Locke were the two models that had contributed most to the formation of his style. In the midst of learned argument and facetious anecdote, he would arouse 'new emotions (we are told) in tender hearts by his naïve and touching sensibility'. Never had Suard beheld so buoyant yet so sensitive, so outspoken

yet so courteous, so entirely odd and original a type of human character; and to the last days of his existence he never quite forgot him. A gesture would return, an image, a turn of phrase: he would see again the attenuated Englishman in his suit of becoming black, and hear him talk of the soul or Locke or the Christian faith, variegating his discourse with lightly improper allusions or glancing from pathos to irony in his usual erratic manner, showing always the same delighted readiness to surrender to a transient mood.

Of Sterne's friendship with Diderot, probably the most important of all his Parisian associations, little now remains on record. They had met through the Baron d'Holbach, and presumably, among other subjects, they must have talked at some length of the beauties of English literature, since Sterne presented Diderot with a selection of English classics, Chaucer, Pope, Locke and the Sermons of Tillotson, accompanied by as much of *Shandy* as had yet been published. Voltaire he was never to meet; but from afar the great old man extended to Sterne's novel his paternal approbation, noting the acuteness of its domestic portraiture, which he compared favourably with 'the paintings of Rembrandt and the sketches of Callot', and acclaiming this author, side by side with Swift, as 'the second Rabelais of England'. A useful passport to immortality, but not perhaps a very accurate description of Sterne's essential merit! Indeed, Sterne at this period, before the publication of the *Sentimental Journey*, received from French admirers rather more flattery than critical understanding. They admired the delineation of his main characters; they appreciated the prodigious vivacity of the novelist's discursive style—*Des pensées morales, fines, délicates, saillantes, solides, fortes, impies, hazardées, téméraires; voila ce que l'on trouve dans cet ouvrage. . . . L'Auteur n'a ni plan, ni principes, ni système, il ne veut que parler, et malheureusement on l'écoute avec plaisir*; but they were disconcerted—maybe they were sometimes a little bored—by the shapelessness of the work in its entirety, and by the extravagant licence Sterne had allowed himself in pursuing his digressions. Sterne, however, was not a man who often troubled to criticize his critics, provided, that is to say, they helped to increase his sales. What he enjoyed was celebrity and the privileges it brought him—the sight of *Tristram Shandy* carefully opened on a nobleman's *écritoire* in preparation for his visit, or lying on a dressing-table among combs

and pomatum-boxes. The Duc d'Orléans certainly welcomed him, and might or might not read him. He had the entry of the Palais Royal; and La Popelinière, a princely figure in the world of finance, offered him the freedom of his 'music and table' for the remainder of his stay. Meanwhile his friends and family were kept acquainted with his progress. It could not be said that, either as a husband or a father, he had failed to do his duty—sometimes, indeed, a little more than his duty—now that his literary reputation was extending throughout Europe; and when, in the April of 1762, he learned that Lydia's health was troublesome and doctors had advised she should be removed from England, he decided to cancel his own plans (which had involved returning home by leisurely stages during the early summer), persuade his wife and child to join him and set out for the south of France.

In the furtherance of this scheme, he proved at once patient, practical and energetic. There were letters to be written to the Archbishop of York and to Lord Fauconberg, the patron of his Coxwold living, and long, long directions to be sent to Mrs. Sterne, advising in detail on the luggage she should come equipped with—negligées and a gown or two of English painted linen, a pound of Scotch snuff and her silver coffee-pot, watch-chains to serve as gifts to various helpful friends, a copper tea-kettle, pins and needles, 'as also a strong bottle-skrew, for whatever Scrub we may hire as butler, coachman, &c., to uncork us our Frontiniac'. Then, there were passports to be procured from the Duc de Choiseul; and it was while he was attending to this last requirement that over-exertion brought on a recurrence of his former malady, and he was attacked by fever which 'ended the worst way it could . . . in a *defluxion poitrine*, as the French physicians call it', and he 'lost in ten days all I have gain'd since I came here'. But once more he rallied and, about the middle of July, a period of sweltering heat, accompanied by Mrs. and Miss Sterne, whose expensive equipage had rolled into Paris a few days earlier, he took the road south, in his own carriage, bound for Toulouse, which he intended to make his refuge during the autumn and winter months.

Their journey was uncomfortable and adventurous. At Lyons, where the chaise in which the Sternes were riding broke down, fell to pieces and was sold for scrap, they travelled by water to

Avignon, there again transferred to a carriage and, with Sterne himself sometimes ahead and sometimes far behind, riding or walking or joining in peasant dances, stopping a countrywoman to buy her figs, talking with a couple of Franciscan friars or with a drum-maker on his way to the fairs at Beaucaire and Tarascon; they presently dawdled into Toulouse about the middle of August 1762. Sterne was to remain in the south for nearly two years, first in Toulouse, the inhabitant of a large, elegantly furnished house, 'most deliciously placed at the extremity of the town', afterwards in Montpellier, Aix and Marseilles. During this period his health, in spite of some preliminary improvement, remained exceedingly precarious. He suffered from the searching cold of a Mediterranean winter, spat blood, shivered with ague and was once 'almost poisoned' by what the physicians of the neighbourhood styled a *bouillon rafraichissant*—"tis a cock flayed alive and boiled with poppy seeds, then pounded in a mortar, afterwards pass'd through a sieve. . . ." Such 'scuffles with death', in which the long-legged spectre who had followed him from London seemed often as near as in England to getting the upper hand, left him pallid, emaciated, nervous yet never quite exhausted. His faculties were still clear, his eyes still sharp; he was still talkative, ribald, inquiring wherever he found himself; or with a bottle of Frontinac at his elbow (as often as he was not dieting on ass's and cow's milk), and for prospect the 'serpentine walks' of his Toulouse garden, worked away intermittently at the task of completing his book.

It was lack of money that, in the end, brought him home to London. And the decision to return had important domestic results: for Mrs. Sterne, who had found very much to her taste the mixed and lively social world that she and her daughter could enjoy in Toulouse, announced that her rheumatism obliged her to stay behind. Sterne acquiesced, with considerable private relief though some alarm at the prospect of maintaining henceforward two separate establishments. But, so long as he breathed, he refused to despair of the future; and in March 1764, with a touch of real sorrow at leaving his 'little slut', Lydia, and a seemingly show of regret at parting from Mrs. Sterne, he set out again towards Paris on his way to London and York. In Paris, caught up in the crowd of travelling Englishmen who since the suspension of hostilities had begun to sweep across the Channel, he enjoyed a holiday from

domestic tedium that lasted for two months. Wilkes was there, endeavouring with his usual success to make the best of both worlds, alternately the man of pleasure and the courageous, devoted victim of a despotic government; and Sterne joined him in 'an odd party' (so Wilkes informed Churchill) to which various 'goddesses of the theatre' had also been invited. Hume, the sleepy lion of a brilliant bevy of admirers, he met and argued with good-naturedly over the table of the British Ambassador, Lord Hertford. For the purposes of this argument, which occurred after Sterne had preached an affecting sermon in the chapel of the Embassy, he reassumed the rôle of parson and, among much laughter on both sides in which the company joined, gravely pretended to assert the truth of miracles. But perhaps he was more than half sincere. So little concerned with facts, so deeply absorbed in all those impressions, visions and imaginings that give our life its colour, he was certainly no sceptic of a logical or positive cast. The nature of the self was a mystery, his own continued existence a kind of miracle; and a new hemorrhage presently reminded him that the miracle on which he relied might not often be repeated. Back in London at the beginning of June, he stayed long enough to sit for another portrait by Joshua Reynolds, then travelled north for York races and an interval of parish work. Finally, having refreshed himself by a trip to Scarborough, he was able to fix his attention on the business of writing a novel, and turned out the seventh and eighth volumes of *Tristram Shandy*, probably the most unequal that he had yet produced, in time for publication at the close of January 1765.

His next task was to obtain a large body of subscribers for two further volumes of *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, that curious and, from a mystical point of view, not very consolatory compilation of religious essays in which the Second Person of the Trinity is but rarely represented, and the First and Third as Abstract Benevolence or Deified Commonsense. Their appearance provided an excuse to return to London; and in London he dined out again so well and energetically that, as usual, his health suffered and he was obliged to retire to Bath. There, surrounded by a crowd of idle and admiring women, it was natural that he should fall back into a series of flirtations, of the half-passionate, half-platonic kind to which his peculiar sexual temperament, so lively yet so volatile and so unfocused, had

always predisposed him. He may or may not have *made* love, but the proximity or possibility of love afforded a stimulus that his imagination needed. His heart was generally in a condition of pleasing unrest; and, while his time at Bath was spent in oscillating between such luminaries as 'the charming widow Moor', 'the gentle, elegant Gore, with her fine form and Grecian face', and 'another widow, the interesting Mrs. Vesey, with her vocal and fifty other accomplishments', having returned to London he is discovered sending tender and somewhat equivocal propositions to a certain Lady Percy, Lord Bute's daughter, the ill-behaved wife of the heir to the dukedom of Northumberland, whose 'eyes and lips', he declared, had totally bewitched him.

These gossamer associations were attractive but thin-spun; and, when during the second week of October 1765 Sterne embarked on the last and most famous and fruitful of his continental journeys, there was no bond, either of heart or head, to hold him back to England. He set out in exuberant spirits . . . But all that deserves to be remembered of the expedition—highlights of feeling and observation that the traveller brings home with him at last as his only real treasure-trove—remain imprisoned under crystal in the book he was soon to write. Besides the essence of his adventures as he himself conveyed them, any additional information research can supply seems clumsy and irrelevant. But it is worth noting that, after his meeting with the Piedmontese Lady who shared his bedroom at the 'little decent kind of an inn' when he was held up by a fall of rock on the road 'between St. Michael and Modane', he pressed forward through the terrors of the Alps, emerged with relief on the northern Italian plain, admired Turin, was well received at Milan (where he enjoyed an amatory brush with the celebrated Marchesa Fagniani), paid a brief visit to Florence and dined with Horace Mann, performed the usual round of Roman sight seeing, and basked, full of vitality and contentment, beneath the beaming sky of Naples. It was not until May that he again traversed the Alps—much improved (he told his friends), fat and sleek and handsome, and quite prepared for the rather hazardous business of meeting Mrs. Sterne, who was wandering at large with his daughter among the resorts of France. But the meeting, when it occurred, passed off not unpleasantly. The poor woman, he remarked, had been 'very cordial, etc.', but begged to be allowed



to remain in the land that suited her; and Sterne gave his permission and quietly went on his way. During the summer of 1766, he stepped down for the last time from the deck of the Channel packet, confident (he assured Hall-Stevenson) that he would live another ten years.

He returned, enriched and refreshed. The contribution of France and Italy to Sterne's development needs very little underlining. *Tristram Shandy* from first to last is an exceedingly uneven book, obscured by patches of fog, disfigured by the perverse oddities and deliberate eccentricities that have appealed always to certain aspects of the English temperament. It suggests the climate of Yorkshire and the humours of a provincial city. Soon Sterne's imagination was to assume a clearer, warmer and less uncertain colouring. Illness had given an added quality to his appreciation of the South—the beauty of southern landscapes in which by a very small stretch of fancy he could retrace the classical countryside of Claude and Poussin, with its dark myrtles, shaggy hills and vast, gold-glimmering, ethereal prospects, and the gaiety and sensual simplicity of Mediterranean manners. Life at Coxwold by comparison seemed bleak and anxious. His health had deteriorated since his return to England; Mrs. Sterne's demands for money were a continual nuisance; the plan to increase his acreage by the enclosure of Stillington Common made repeated, tormenting inroads upon his time and energy. In spite of these annoyances he still contrived to work, and resumed the rather tangled narrative of Uncle Toby's love-making. By the end of the year, the ninth volume of his novel had been handed to the publisher.

In fact, the ninth was the last; but it did not conclude the story. To such a story there could be no end, since it had had no beginning; his reveries are not wound up but merely cut short; and the solution of Uncle Toby's problem remains perpetually unsettled. Perhaps Sterne now understood that he had embarked on an endless task; but, though there is a suggestion of fatigue about some of the later passages, and many of the travel notes that Sterne interpolated, presumably by way of padding, in Volumes VII, VIII and IX, are both facetious and irrelevant, his virtues proved as irrepressible as his accompanying literary vices. He is foolish, jaunty, over-whimsical; but his gift for simple and vivid imagery is constantly breaking through; and

the travel-jottings, among much that is trivial and a good deal that is tedious, include the episodes of the poor, pensive ass which he had fed on macaroons at Lyons, and the mad girl, Maria (afterwards remembered in the *Sentimental Journey*), seated at the roadside, playing her evening tune. Uncle Toby and his soldier-servant are solid as never before. Displaying his customary grasp of detail, Sterne manages to invest the inventory of Uncle Toby's wardrobe, 'his tarnished gold-laced hat and huge cockade of flimsy taffety', with an air of heroic significance that expresses the natural grandeur of a simple, unselfish man. Even Corporal Trim's improper stories have an oddly poetic side. Over the anecdote of the Young Beguine hovers the midday hush of the deserted Flemish farm-house; while the account of how the Corporal's brother Tom had married the Jew's widow at Lisbon (which terminates with an innuendo of a particularly salacious sort) is picked out by sudden glimpses of living and moving figures:

'Every servant in the family, from high to low, wished Tom success; and I can fancy, an' please your honour, I see him this moment with his white dimity waistcoat and breeches, and a hat a little o' one side, passing jollily along the street, swinging his stick . . .

'When Tom . . . got to the shop, there was nobody in it but a poor negro girl, with a bunch of white feathers slightly tied to the end of a long cane, flapping away flies—not killing them.—"Tis a pretty picture!" said my uncle Toby . . .

Memorable, too, are the long artful passages in which Sterne builds up an emotional effect with deliberate virtuosity; and just as Volume VI had contained the famous set-piece of Uncle Toby sleeping (so somniferous in its rhythm, in its imagery so suggestive of a group of allegorical statuary after the manner of Roubiliac), Volume IX introduces the exquisite invocation, the last that Sterne would ever compose, to his 'dear Jenny', ghostly counterpart of Catherine Fourmontelle, now separated from him by many years, by age and alienation, perhaps by death itself. He is discussing the significance that posterity may or may not attach to Mrs. Shandy's sayings. But—

'I will not argue the matter: Time wastes too fast: every letter I trace tells me with what rapidity Life follows my pen; the days and hours of it more precious,—my dear Jenny,—than the rubies about thy neck, are flying over our heads like

light clouds of a windy day, never to return more; everything presses on,—whilst thou art twisting that lock!—see! it grows gray; and every time I kiss thy hand to bid adieu, and every absence which follows it, are preludes to that eternal separation which we are shortly to make.—

‘Heaven have mercy upon us both!’

So, as if a cold wind had swept across the page, the chapter ends abruptly. Gone for a moment are the old soldier and his servant and the amorous middled-aged widow who is planning Uncle Toby’s downfall. Temporarily, his characters vanish: only the writer remains, confronted by the prospect, which grew more and more distinct, of his own approaching dissolution. His lungs (he had already told a friend) reminded him of a pair of badly-mended bellows. There had been repeated hemorrhages, further periods of complete physical exhaustion. Yet January 1767 saw him back again in London, established in comfortable lodgings at 41 Old Bond Street, from which he hurried out to dinner and supper, renewed his admiration for Garrick and his acquaintanceship with the Duke of York, and made an appearance at Mrs. Cornelys’ famous Carlisle House assemblies. Among his more recent friends was the celebrated Commodore James, distinguished for his expedition against the Bombay pirates, whom he had subdued in the service of the British East India Company. Reynolds’ portrait of James shows an ugly but agreeable face; while Mrs. James, an alleged beauty, was both an ‘interesting’ woman, in the eighteenth century sense of the term, and, even by Shandean standards, highly sentimental. Sterne was soon the intimate of their house in Gerrard Street; and it was there, apparently not long after his return to London, that he encountered Elizabeth Draper, a young Anglo-Indian married woman, in whose career and supposed misfortunes the sympathetic and effusive Mrs. James took a very lively interest.

Mrs. Draper claimed to have been born on 5 April 1744, and was therefore, at the time of her first meeting with Sterne, not quite twenty-three; but married at the age of fourteen to a man twenty years older than herself, Daniel Draper, now Secretary to the Government of Bombay, she was the mother of two children and had reached a point in the history of her married life when it was natural that she should look around her in search of fresh distractions. Her education had been frivolous, her existence with

Mr. Draper neither stimulating nor romantic. By all accounts he was a mild-mannered and good-tempered man; but Elizabeth found him dull; and when her husband, having brought back his family to England in 1765, himself returned to his duties, leaving Elizabeth to arrange for the education of their children, she passed her time in a round of visits between the houses of various landed relatives scattered through the country and the London establishment of her friends, the Jameses. From them, and more particularly from Mrs. James, both her looks and her talents received their proper share of admiration. Nicknamed the '*belle Indian*', she combined a charming face and a pathetic history. Soon she must say goodbye to England; and her numerous devotees continued to remind her how deep would be England's loss.

Such a tale of worth and suffering was bound to interest Sterne. Moreover, though (as he was once bold enough to admit) his first glance had shown him merely a plain and affected young woman, dressed in a fashionable but unbecoming manner, there was '*a something*' about her eyes and voice—a '*bewitching sort of nameless excellence*', calculated to appeal to any man of '*sense, tenderness and feeling*'—that Sterne and later admirers found inimitably persuasive. Her features were enclosed in a '*perfect oval*'. As for the rest, '*a statuary* (according to one of the last of her adorers, that infatuated historian, the Abbé Raynal) '*who would have wished to represent Voluptuousness, would have taken her for his model; and she would equally have served for him who might have had a figure of Modesty to portray . . . Desire . . . followed her steps in silence.*' To the impression that she made on Sterne, something, no doubt, was added by her exotic origins. In the more imaginative type of love-affair, the figure that occupies the foreground is often much indebted to its immediate background; and haloing the personality of Elizabeth Draper were the sunsets of the Malabar Coast and the green palm-fronds of Anjengo. She belonged to a world not completely European, a world of bilious, blood-shot, grasping, hard-drinking men and of languid, frivolous, ignorant, short-lived women. Elizabeth, however, was of a more exuberant, cultivated and inquiring turn than the great majority of Anglo-Indian '*nabobesses*' whose upbringing and manner of life she found equally deplorable. Vaguely but persistently she longed

for better things; and, in the company at the Jameses' house, which included several presentable and distinguished men, Sterne was the most distinguished and also, one may assume, by far the most beguiling.

In a very short time, he had written sending her his books—the sermons which arrived ‘all hot from the heart’ and *Shandy* about whose reception he was ‘more indifferent’—and had informed her that ‘I know not how it comes in—but I’m half in love with You . . . I never valued (or saw more good Qualities to value)—or thought more of one of Yr Sex than of You.’ They met frequently; and it was not long before Mrs. Draper was dining at 41 Old Bond Street, alone with the author off ‘scollop’d oysters’ or ‘Mackerel & fowl’, attended by his sympathetic and understanding maid. In every life, just as there are shades of emotion that reappear, so there are situations that occur again and again; and these delightful dinner-parties had been foreshadowed some twenty-six years earlier by the ‘sentimental repasts’ he had enjoyed with Miss Elizabeth Lumley. Then, too, they had had a *confidante*—the rôle that Mrs. James had now adopted; then, too, a sympathetic maid-servant had hovered solicitously around them. But the knowledge that no sensation, no situation, is ever quite new detracts nothing from its intensity. Behind Sterne lay more than three decades of tentative philandering, of tremulous approaches to the idea of passion. The new preoccupation, into which he gradually slipped, presently absorbed him to the exclusion of every other interest. The atmosphere of Little Alice Lane was revived at 41 Old Bond Street; the dead attraction towards Miss Lumley was reborn in a more powerful and much more absorbing guise. Sterne embarked on this latest adventure conscious that he might not live to see how the story ended.

Meanwhile, all was serenity, confidence and disinterested feeling. He called Elizabeth his ‘Bramine’, himself her ‘Bramin’; they exchanged portraits by fashionable miniaturists, and Mrs. Draper presented her Bramin, some time during her stay in London, with ‘a gold stock buckle and buttons’, to which he was soon to attach an almost talismanic value. But there was no pretence at privacy about their odd *liaison*, for both esteemed themselves superior to conventional prejudices—true ‘delicacy and propriety’, Sterne was to declare when Mrs. Draper had

fallen ill and had announced that he must not visit her so long as she remained in bed, had very little in common with such 'frigid doctrines'; and their friends were welcome to observe how the attachment flourished. Observers could hardly misinterpret so pure a friendship. Mrs. Sterne, nevertheless, safely in the depths of France, heard stories and caused Lydia to send an inquiring message, possibly not cantankerous, yet decidedly suspicious: to which Sterne wrote back in February, again through Lydia, that he did 'not wish to know who was the busy fool who made your mother uneasy about Mrs. . . . —'tis true I have a friendship for her, but not to infatuation—I believe I have judgment enough to discern hers, and every woman's faults.' Some faults, it is true, he may have noticed earlier: during the opening weeks of their intimacy he may have been some distance still from desperate infatuation. When a letter reached London during the course of February, addressed to Mrs. Draper by her husband, instructing her, firmly and plainly, to return to her Indian duties, his last defences collapsed, reason and moderation were finally overthrown, and Sterne was revealed as the despairing victim of an extravagant and hopeless love.

To determine the part played by desire seems now an insoluble problem. In a letter written to Mrs. Draper after she had left the country, describing the state of his health and an unfair and improper diagnosis put forward by his doctors, Sterne declared categorically that he had told them that he had had 'no commerce whatever with the Sex—not even with my wife . . . these 15 years . . .'<sup>1</sup> Was Elizabeth meant to accept this curious statement with certain reservations? And, if their relationship had been wholly platonic, would Sterne have ventured to make the assertion at all? The question, it may be argued, remains relatively unimportant; for, whatever the forms that his desire assumed, there seems very little doubt that the desire existed, that Sterne's sentimentality had a predominantly sexual tinge, just as his salacity, at its most unrestrained, was often suffused with a sentimental colouring. In Elizabeth Draper, it was both his good fortune and his tragedy—aided, as is almost every lover, by adventitious circumstance, by a need that he happened to feel in himself and romantic associations he himself supplied—to

<sup>1</sup> The whole of this passage is reproduced, almost word for word, in a letter to Lord Spencer of 21 May.

find a woman who stirred his imagination as it never had been stirred before. She gratified the imaginative concupiscence that was one of his strongest traits, and gave full scope to his large capacity for disinterested and tender emotion.

His feelings were now exposed to a peculiarly cruel test. Alleging that Mrs. Draper's 'tender frame'—for she had 'looked like a drooping lily' since she had first received Mr. Draper's command to return home—could not be expected to stand the shock of immediate transplantation, he begged that she would put off her departure at least another year, advised her to reason with her husband (who, 'if he is the generous, humane man you describe him to be, . . . cannot but applaud your conduct'), offered, should Mr. Draper prove unkind, to pay her whole expenses and, supposing that her health was thought to need a course of foreign travel, to send her to France and Italy in charge of his wife and daughter. But Elizabeth, though not averse from enacting the rôle of matrimonial victim, was disinclined to forego the advantages of a respectably married state; and with affecting resignation she decided to obey the summons. An East Indiaman was due to sail during the early part of April; Mrs. Draper's passage was booked; the last visits were made, the last gifts exchanged; finally, one day towards the end of March, he handed the Bramine into the chaise which was to carry her from London down to the ship at Deal, then, in agony of spirit, returned to his empty lodgings.

Perhaps he had not suspected how heavily the blow would fall. So long as Eliza remained in England, Sterne continued to write her feverishly affectionate letters, ordering an armchair for her cabin, purchasing her 'ten handsome brass screws, to hang your necessities upon', interviewing Zumps, the maker of musical instruments, as to the best method of tuning the piano-forte she was taking with her, and expressing tremulous anxiety when he learned that her sleeping-quarters had been freshly painted. Even now, he begged that she would consider the postponement of her journey. In a penultimate epistle he implored that, were Mr. Draper to die—and Mrs. Sterne, he added parenthetically, could not expect to live long—she would not think of giving herself to some wealthy nabob, 'because I design to marry you myself. . . . 'Tis true, I am ninety-five in constitution . . . but what I want in youth, I will make up in wit



and good humour.—Not Swift so loved his Stella, Scarron his Maintenon, or Waller his Sacharissa, as I will love and sing thee, my wife elect . . . Tell me, in answer to this, that you approve and honour the proposal, and that you would (like the Spectator's mistress) have more joy in putting on an old man's slipper, than associating with the gay, the voluptuous, and the young.—Adieu, my Simplicia! Yours, Tristram.'

Ten minutes after the letter had gone, he collapsed completely. ' . . . This poor, fine-spun frame of Yorick's gave way, and I broke a vessel in my breast, and could not stop the loss of blood till four this morning.' Then he had fallen asleep, only to be visited by a vision of Mrs. Draper, come to receive his 'parting breath and blessing', and woke again 'with the bosom of my shirt steeped in tears'. Nevertheless he felt the principle of life, he assured her, still strong within him; he had high hopes that he would live to see her again; and, that the close sympathy they had once enjoyed might not be weakened or attenuated by the fact of separation, he began, after composing a 'last farewell to Eliza' to go by 'Mr. Wats who sails this day for Bombay', a *Journal to Eliza*, in which he proposed to keep a full and accurate record of all the visions and sensations with which her memory inspired him. He persevered from 12 or 13 April till 4 August 1767 (when the arrival of Mrs. Sterne and Lydia distracted his attention), adding a tender postscript on 1 November, as soon as he had said good-bye to them and regained his independence. The result was an unusually interesting, if somewhat unpleasing, document. The writer opened with an attempt at literary artifice: 'This Journal wrote under the fictitious names of Yorick & Draper—and sometimes of Bramin & Bramine—but tis a Diary of the miserable feelings of a person separated from a Lady for whose Society he languish'd—The real Names—are foreigne—& the acc<sup>t</sup> a copy from a french Mans'—in Mr. S——s hands . . .' Thenceforward he plunged straight into a daily journal, undeterred either by considerations of literary correctness or by the sense of modesty that usually regulates such a display of passion. He is unashamedly, now and then disturbingly or pathetically, explicit. No doubt, it is the work of an extremely unhappy man; and with feelings of vexed embarrassment we follow 'poor sick-headed, sick-hearted Yorick,' as he lies in bed (visited, however, by '40 friends, in

the Course of the Day'), totters out to dine with the Jameses, or eats his chicken alone, washing down the meal with a sauce of bitter tears. It is true that, in the search for diversion, he had dragged himself as far as the Brawn's Head, there to carouse with Hall-Stevenson and 'the whole Pandamonium assembled'; but for that outburst he had paid 'a severe reckoning all the night'; and by the end of April he was too ill to leave his arm-chair, passed his days in restless reverie and the hours of darkness, as often as he snatched an interval of sleep, in dreams of 'things terrible & impossible—That Eliza is false to Yorick, or Yorick is false to Eliza'.

It is obvious that Sterne was completely sincere—that his emotion, that is to say, was entirely genuine and that the effect produced on his imagination exquisitely painful. But sincerity—more especially when we are speaking of a literary artist—is always qualified by a certain degree of unconscious self-deception; and, aware of the parallelism between his passion for Mrs. Draper and the passion he had once entertained for Miss Elizabeth Lumley, he did not hesitate to ransack his ancient love-letters and from the epistles he had formerly addressed to an uninspiring wife to copy out a long passage for the benefit of a beloved mistress: '. . . One solitary plate—one knife—one fork—one glass!—O Eliza! 'twas painfully distressing.—I gave a thousand pensive penetrating Looks at the Arm chair thou so often graced on these quiet, sentimental Repasts—& sighed & laid down my knife and fork,—& took out my handkerchief . . .', transcribing the paragraph sentence by sentence, and almost word for word. As usual, his flight ended in a fit of abundant weeping; during April and part of May, Sterne's energetic tear-glands rarely lacked employment; then the downpour began to thin, though it was never quite suspended, and we catch a glimpse of Yorick in a more familiar guise, driving in the Park where a dashing acquaintance whom he had nicknamed Sheba cantered up to his carriage to enquire how her Solomon did, paying a brief call at Ranelagh Gardens, or supping at Spencer House. The conclusion of May found him well enough to return to Coxwold; and on the 22nd he left London and Bond Street and travelled slowly northwards, breaking his journey at the palace of the amiable Bishop of York, to whom in his family circle Sterne displayed the portrait of Eliza which he carried

next his heart, accompanying it with a 'short but interesting Story of my friendship for the Original . . .' The episcopal family party was much affected; and Sterne was able to record that he had been 'kindly nursed and honoured'; after which he once more set out towards his long-neglected living.

There he soon received the alarming intelligence that Mrs. Sterne proposed to visit him. 'This unexpected visit (he informed Eliza) is neither a visit of friendship or form—but 'tis a visit, such as I know you will never make me—of pure Interest—to pillage what they can from me.' First, he was required to sell a small estate and lay out the proceeds in joint annuities; and to this he assented without much grumbling; but he dreaded the prospect of being additionally plundered in a hundred small particulars, 'Linnens—for house use—Body use—printed Linnens for Gowns—Mazareens of Teas—Plate (all I have (but 6 Silver Spoons)—In short I shall be pluck'd bare . . .' Meanwhile it was his consolation to lay plans for future felicity that he still hoped might be realized: to stroll, when his health had recovered, to a nearby romantic ruin, uprooting briars beside the path and reflecting how often—'you swinging upon my arm'—at some happy, distant period he would perhaps retrace his footsteps: and to furnish at Shandy Hall 'a sweet little apartment', diminutive but elegantly proportioned, with just space 'to hang a dozen petticoats—gowns, &c.—& Shelves for as many Band-boxes', in a style worthy of the woman he considered his wife elect.

These dreams he turned over in solitude. Towards the end of June, he was sufficiently robust to pay a brief visit to Hall-Stevenson at Skelton, there pass Eliza's portrait round the Demoniac table and race his chaise along the mirror-smoothness of Saltburn Sands; but by 29 June he was back at Coxwold, surrounded by 'all the simple clean plenty which a Valley can produce', venison, wild fowl, curds and strawberries and cream, yet pursued by the constant visionary apparition of the mistress-wife with whom he hoped one day to share it. Time plodded on slowly; desire and expectation haunted his days and nights; he walked 'like a disturbed spirit' about his garden, or remained indoors, distempered and melancholy, observed only by his cat which sat quietly beside him, purring *pianissimo* ' & looking up gravely from time to time in my face, as if she knew my situation'.

It is not difficult to deride *The Journal to Eliza*, Sterne's extravagant sentimentality and effusive self-pity, which induced the lover to carry about with him against the beloved's return a collection of cambric handkerchiefs steeped in his heart's blood. But then, the book is to be regarded as a love-letter; and few letters of that kind, written with genuine passion, do much credit either to the niceness of the writer's taste or to the justice of his understanding. Admittedly, Sterne had lost his balance. Disease was working in him faster than he yet suspected; a long habit of evading passion—or of distilling from passion its sentimental essence, to be used like a heady perfume, till drop by drop it evaporated on the common daily air—had at length broken down, with disastrous consequences to his health and sanity. But the balance, forfeited in one respect, was maintained firmly in another. On 6 July he had informed the Jameses that he was 'now beginning to be truly busy at my Sentimental Journey', and thenceforward *Journal* and *Journey* went steadily hand in hand. Both were interrupted by the arrival, during the early part of August, of Mrs. and Miss Sterne, Lydia, accomplished, affectionate, talkative, accompanied by her 'rather devilish' French dog, which he feared might break into the *pianissimo* purrings of his sentimental cat, his wife full of plans for her own financial future. But his apprehensions were unfounded; the 'restless unreasonable Wife whom (he told his mistress) neither gentleness nor generosity can conquer', proved far more amenable to reason than her husband had expected; and, when the pair finally left his house on the first day of November, Mrs. Sterne vowed that she would never give him 'another sorrowful or discontented hour'—and, what was no less to the purpose, never return from France—while Lydia, though a frivolous and self-indulgent girl, refused the small sum with which he had presented her by way of pocket-money.

Released from the agitation they had caused him, he resumed his travel-book. The work progressed rapidly; at the end of November he had written the last page and lapsed into a state of complete exhaustion, having 'torn my whole frame into pieces' (he informed a correspondent) by the violence of his feelings. As usual, he rallied and, as usual, returned to London; but *The Sentimental Journey* seemed to demand and to deserve more meticulous revision than any of its predecessors; and February 1768 was

almost finished before two small octavo volumes appeared in London and at once found their way across the Channel to the Parisian literary public. The success of the work (for which Sterne had already received an advance payment of a thousand guineas) was extensive and immediate; Smollett's hirelings might deliver some clumsy critical jabs, French readers express surprise both at the 'lowness' of Sterne's subject-matter and the extreme oddity that characterized his relations with the opposite sex; but here was a book in which, even more clearly and brilliantly than in his novel and sermons, the intelligent public of the age found its sensibility reflected, and recognized that peculiar blend of emotion and intelligence, of sympathy and understanding, suggestively summed up in the one word 'sentimental'.

His new book marked the *crescendo* of Sterne's literary development. *The Sentimental Journey* is the most readable of minor masterpieces, just as *Tristram Shandy*, taken as a whole, is probably one of the least readable of works to which critics of the past have decided to allot an important place upon our bookshelves. It was written with love, and (Sterne had assured his daughter) composed in a spirit of love, the design being 'to teach us to love the world and our fellow creatures better than we do—so it runs most upon those gentle passions and affections, which aid so much to it'. Of greater consequence than its moral pretensions (which we cannot discount but need not, perhaps, take very seriously) is the author's attitude towards himself and the world he was describing. Poets had already discovered that the mind was its 'own place': no prose writer of genius had yet suggested that the vagaries and adventures of the mind, outside the limits of poetry, rhetoric, drama, might provide their own literary justification. Or, if they had done so, they had not set to work with such complete shamelessness. Sterne is a traveller who laughs at guide-books, and the 'objects of interest' to which writers of guide-books devote their space and energy. He is concerned solely with himself and with his personal response to the things that he observes. The only condition he demands is complete emotional receptivity:

'What a large volume of adventures (he wrote) may be grasped within this little span of life, by him who interests his heart in everything, and who, having eyes to see what time and what chance are perpetually holding out to him as he

journeyeth on his way, misses nothing he can *fairly* lay his hands on!’

*The Sentimental Journey* is, therefore, a text-book on feeling, an exposition of how, in any given set of circumstances, to behave in a sentimental and civilized mode, and was presently to be adopted as such by its admirers throughout Europe. But what admirers and imitators could not borrow was Yorick’s special temperament, the odd mixture of detached interest and passionate, effusive sympathy with which he turned his eyes upon the world around him. Sterne’s pathetic passages have a peculiar vibrant quality; his erotic passages, too—so shocking to the squeamish Victorian taste—are remarkably different from other examples of modern erotic literature. There is the same detachment we are aware of when he is sentimental, the same careful notation of movements and impulses, as if it were a piece of music, not ordinary sexual dalliance between a man and a woman, that the author were recording. Read, for instance, the story of his visit to the glove shop:

‘The beautiful *grisette* measured them one by one across my hand.—It would not alter the dimensions.—She begged I would try a single pair, which seemed to be the least.—She held it open;—my hand slipped into it at once. “It will not do,” said I, shaking my head a little.—“No,” said she, doing the same thing.

‘There are certain combined looks of simple subtlety—where whim, and sense, and seriousness, and nonsense are so blended that all the languages of Babel set loose together could not express them;—they are communicated and caught so instantaneously that you can scarce say which party is the infector . . . It is enough in the present to say again, the gloves would not do; so folding our hands within our arms, we both loll’d upon the counter;—it was narrow, and there was just room for the parcel to lay between us.

The Traveller sees every object through the glass of his own temperament, feels every moment in the setting of a particular mood. He is low-minded, high-flown, sensual, compassionate—all in as short a time as it takes to turn the page or a sequence of images to cross the fancy. The charm of Sterne’s method is its constant changefulness. Yet through the changes runs a

distinct, if tenuous, thread of individual continuity. Shape merges into shape, but Yorick remains; and, though the world itself is presented as extraordinarily various in its human details and inexhaustibly entertaining, there, too, certain patterns perpetually turn up, certain aspirations that age, habit, suffering can never quite extinguish. Do not human beings continue to pine for freedom? A caged starling becomes the symbol of this thwarted longing:

‘I was interrupted . . . with a voice which I took to be of a child, which complained “it could not get out”—I look’d up and down the passage . . . seeing neither man, woman, nor child. . . .

‘In my return back through the same passage, I heard the same words repeated twice over; and looking up, I saw it was a starling hung in a little cage;—“I can’t get out—I can’t get out,” said the starling.’

And there are other impulses, equally strong, equally persistent, which confront the Traveller again and again through the course of his wanderings—impulses of passion and charity, of hope and pride, indestructible expressions of the human spirit, like the impulse that urged Candide to plant a garden. Thus, the book is the work of a humanist in the truest sense of the word, who makes his ‘true dimension’ the capacity and mind of man, who loves life, welcomes experience and has not yet lost all his faith in the infinite possibilities of common human nature. Sterne’s own love of life was certainly a dominant trait. The writer who had been ‘torn to pieces’ by the composition of the *Sentimental Journey*, the poor ‘sick-headed, sick-hearted’ consumptive of the *Journal to Eliza*, presently rose from his sick-bed, put aside his journal and, accompanied by Hall-Stevenson, had come rolling back to London. There awaited him the customary round of visits and engagements and, as soon as his book had appeared, even more than his usual share of flattery and attention. But the winter months were wet and cold; late in February he was attacked by influenza which, notwithstanding all his efforts and ‘something like revelation . . .’ (he wrote to Mrs. Montagu) ‘which tells me I shall not dye—but live’, proved impossible to shake off. Influenza turned to pleurisy; then on 15 March, in a tone that for the first time seems to suggest despair, he wrote a letter—almost, but not quite, a letter of farewell—to Mrs. James



at Gerrard Street. He had been bled three times the previous Thursday, and blistered during Friday: 'The physician says I am better—God knows, for I feel myself sadly wrong, and shall, if I recover, be a long while of gaining strength. . . . Dearest, kindest, gentlest, and best of women! may health, peace and happiness prove your handmaids.—If I die, cherish the remembrance of me, and forget the follies which you so often condemn'd. . . . Should my child, my Lydia, want a mother, may I hope you will (if she is left parentless) take her to your bosom?' There is no reference to Elizabeth Draper. Perhaps that delusive image had already begun to fade, as the distance between them lengthened and the approach of the long-legged phantom which had pursued him so patiently, so indefatigably, grew more and more perceptible. The last encounter occurred at four o'clock in the afternoon of 18 March, 1768, before only two indifferent witnesses. A large dinner-party of gentlemen, which included Hume and Garrick, the Duke of Roxburgh and the notorious Lord March, the future Duke of Queensberry, sent an attendant round to Bond Street to inquire after their friend's health. 'I went to Mr. Sterne's lodgings (the young man remembered); the mistress opened the door; I inquired how he did? She told me to go up to the nurse. I went into the room, and he was just a dying. I waited ten minutes; but in five he said, "*Now it is come*". He put up his hand, as if to stop a blow, and died in a minute.'

## CONSTRUCTIVE ART

*An Exchange of Letters between*

*NAUM GABO and HERBERT READ*

DEAR HERBERT,

It is now more than a year and a half since HORIZON asked me to write an article about my own work. At that time I light-heartedly promised to do it and only later did it dawn on me that I had engaged myself in an adventure full of peril. When an artist ventures to write about himself and about his work, he is heading straight into a minefield where his first mistake will be the end of him.

E

Many artists have walked innocently enough into that trap and done themselves more harm than good. Not that their works have actually suffered, but the misunderstandings and misinterpretations unloosed by their words were so confusing that it would have been better had they kept silent.

On the other hand, looking back on the destiny of many works of art in their historical array, and having in view their relation to their own time and people as well as to posterity, I have come to the conclusion that a work of art, restricted to what the artist has put in it, is only a part of itself. It only attains full stature with what people and time make of it.

I realize that in making such a statement I may already have struck a mine—in fact I even sense the distant reverberations of explosions in many artistic camps, friend's and foe's.

I will, therefore, not walk one step farther in this dangerous field without help and guidance from someone who knows the ground and who cares enough about my work and the idea it stands for. After all, my art, as all visual art, is by nature mute. Had the painter or sculptor been able to say in words what he wanted to express with pictorial and spatial means, I do not think there would have been so many pictures and sculptures for the public to look at and for the students of art to explain.

Here is where you come in. You know more than I ever will what the public ought to know in order to judge in fairness about my work. You know both my creed and my work; could you, would you, lend me a hand and lead me through this field to safety?

Ever since I began work on my constructions, and that is now more than a quarter of a century ago, I have been persistently asked innumerable questions, some of which are constantly recurring up to the present day.

Such as, 'Why do I call my work "Constructive"? Why "Abstract"?'

'If I refuse to look to Nature for my forms, where do I get my forms from?'

'What do my works contribute to Society in general, and to our time in particular?'

I have often tried to answer these questions. So have you and others. Some people were satisfied, but in general the confusion is still there, and the questions still persistently recur.

I am afraid that my ultimate answer will always lie in the work itself, but I cannot help feeling that I have no right to neglect them entirely, and in the following notes there may be some clue to an answer for these queries.

I.—My works are what people call 'Abstract'. You know how incorrect this is; still, it is true they have no visible association with the external aspects of the world. But this abstractedness is not the reason why I call my work 'Constructive'; and 'Abstract' is not the core of the Constructive Idea which I profess. This Idea means more to me. It involves the whole complex of human relation to life. It is a mode of thinking, acting, perceiving and living. The Constructive philosophy recognizes only one stream in our existence—life (you may call it creation, it is the same). Any thing or action which enhances life, propels it and adds to it something in the direction of growth, expansion and development, is Constructive. The 'how' is of secondary importance.

Therefore, to be Constructive in art does not necessarily mean to be abstract at all costs: Phidias, Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare, Newton, Pushkin, to name a few—all were Constructive for their time, but it would be inconsistent with the Constructive Idea to accept their way of perception and reaction to the world as an eternal and absolute measure. There is no place in a Constructive philosophy for eternal and absolute truths. All truths and values are our own constructions, subject to the changes of time and space as well as to the deliberate choice of life in its striving towards perfection. I have often used the word 'perfection' and ever so often been mistaken for an ecclesiastic evangelist, which I am not. I never meant 'perfection' in the sense of the superlative of good. 'Perfection,' in the Constructive sense, is not a state but a process; not an ultimate goal but a direction. We cannot achieve perfection by stabilizing it—we can achieve it only by being in its stream; just as we cannot catch a train by riding in it, but once in it, we can increase its speed or stop it altogether; and to be in the train is what the Constructive Idea is striving for.

It may be asked: what has it all to do with art in general and with Constructive art in particular? The answer is: it has to do with art more than with all other activities of the human spirit. I believe art to be the most immediate and most effective

of all means of communication between human beings. Art as a mental action is unambiguous—it does not deceive—it cannot deceive, since it is not concerned with truths. We never ask a tree whether it says the truth, being green. We should never search in a work of art for truth—it is verity itself.

The way in which art perceives the world is sensuous (you may call it intuitive); the way it acts in response to this perception is spontaneous, irrational and factual (you may call it creative), and this is the way of life itself. This way alone brings to us ultimate results, makes history, and moulds life in the form as we know it.

Unless and until we adopt this way of reacting to the world in all our spiritual activities (Science above all included) all our achievements will rest on sand.

Unless and until we have learned to carry our morality, our science, our knowledge, our culture, with the ease with which we carry our heart and brain and the blood in our veins, we will have no morality, no science, no knowledge, no culture.

To this end we have to construct these activities on the foundation and in the spirit of art.

I have chosen the absoluteness and exactitude of my lines, shapes and forms in the conviction that they are the most immediate medium for my communication to others of the rhythms and the state of mind I would wish the world to be in. This not only in the material world surrounding us, but also in the mental and spiritual world we carry within us.

It is becoming more and more incumbent on me to repeat wherever I can that I have never used the primary geometrical figures (such as square, circle, etc.) as ends in themselves. I considered them, and still do consider them, only as elements of a pictorial language. Important and useful as they may be for a constructive artist to begin with as an exercise—they in themselves are nothing more than an *a b c*. It is dangerous and futile to dwell too long in a world which they can encompass alone. These enclosed elemental geometrical figures are too limited and too rigid to express by themselves the boundless complexity of human emotions.

I think that the image my work invokes is the image of good—not of evil; the image of order—not of chaos; the image of life—not of death. And that is all the content of my constructions

amounts to. I should think that this is equally all that constructive idea is driving at.

2.—Again I am repeatedly and annoyingly asked—where then do I get my forms from?

The artist as a rule is particularly sensitive to such intrusion in this jealously guarded depth of his mind—but, I do not see any harm in breaking the rule. I could easily tell where I get the crude content of my forms from provided my words be taken not metaphorically, but literally.

I find them everywhere around me and when I want to see them. I see them, if I put my mind to it, in a torn piece of cloud carried away by the wind. I see them in the green thicket of leaves and trees. I can find them in the naked stones on hills and roads. I may discern them in a steamy trail of smoke from a passing train or on the surface of a shabby wall. I can see them ofteneven on the blank paper of my working-table. I look and find them in the bends of waves on the sea between the openwork of foaming crests; their apparition may be sudden, it may come and vanish in a second, but when they are over they leave with me the image of eternity's duration. I can tell you more (poetic though it may sound, it is nevertheless plain reality): sometimes a falling star, cleaving the dark, traces the breath of night on my window glass, and in that instantaneous flash I might see the very line for which I searched in vain for months and months.

These are the wells from which I draw the crude content of my forms. Of course, I don't take them as they come; the image of my perception needs an order and this order is my construction. I claim the right to do it so because this is what we all do in our mental world; this is what science does, what philosophy does, what life does. We all construct the image of the world as we wish it to be, and this spiritual world of ours will always be what and how we make it. It is Mankind alone that is shaping it in certain order out of a mass of incoherent and inimical realities. This is what it means to me to be Constructive.

3.—I may be in error in presuming that these maxims are simple to explain and easy to understand. I cannot judge, but I know for certain that for me it is much more difficult to prove the social justification for my work at this time.

A world at war, it seems to me, may have the right to reject my work as irrelevant to its immediate needs. I can say but

little in my defence. I can only beg to be believed that I suffer with the world in all the misfortunes which are now fallen upon us. Day and night I carry the horror and pain of the human race with me. Will I be allowed to ask the leaders of the masses engaged in a mortal struggle of sheer survival: 'Must I, ought I, to keep and carry this horror through my art to the people?'—the people in the burned cities and scorched villages, the people in trenches, people in the ashes of their homes, the blinded shadows of human beings from the ruins and gibbets of devastated continents . . . What can I tell *them* about pain and horror that they do not know?

The human race is ill; dangerously, mortally ill—I offer my blood and flesh, for what it is worth, to help them; my life, if it is needed. But what is the worth of a single life—we all have learned to kill with ease and the road of death is made smooth and facile. The venom of hate has become our daily bread and only nurture. Am I to be blamed when I confess that I cannot find inspiration for my art in that stage of death and desolation.

I am offering in my art what comfort I can to alleviate the pains and convulsions of our time. I try to keep our despair from assuming such proportions that nothing will remain in our devastated life to prompt us to live. I try to guard in my work the image of the morrow we left behind us in our memories and foregone aspirations and to remind us that the image of the world can be different. It may be that I don't succeed in that at all, but I would not accept blame for trying it.

Constructive art as a whole, and my work as part of it, has still a long way to go to overcome the atmosphere of controversy that surrounds it. It has been, and still is, deliberately kept from the masses on the grounds that the masses would not understand it, and that it is not the kind of art the masses need. It is always very difficult to argue with anybody on such obscure grounds as this; the simplest and fairest thing to do would be to allow the masses to make their own judgement about this art. I am prepared to challenge any of the representatives of public opinion and put at their disposal any work of mine they choose to be placed where it belongs—namely, where the masses come and go and live and work.—I would submit to any judgement the masses would freely pronounce about it. Would any leader of the masses ever accept my challenge—I wonder!

Meantime I can do nothing but leave my work to the few and selected ones to judge and discriminate.

Yours as ever,

GABO

DEAR GABO,

It was unnecessary to apologize for the way you explain the constructive idea in art; like all artists who feel and think deeply about their work, you have said things which no critic could say for you, and said them with an eloquence which he might well envy. Certainly I myself could not improve on your statement, either by refinement or addition. All I can do, in this brief reply to your letter, is to anticipate some of the misunderstandings to which your words might be open.

You have done two things. You have shown why your art is called, and rightly called, 'constructive'; and you have tackled the problem of 'communication'—the most difficult problem which the artist in a democratic society has to face.

It is unfortunate that there are many sensitive and intelligent lovers of art, with no overriding prejudice against the modern movement as such, who yet fail to respond to so-called 'abstract' art. They find themselves unable to distinguish between a formal arrangement of line and colour which they rightly regard as merely 'decorative': and a constructed object which has a formal life and independence, which exists with an organic vitality all its own.

It seems to me that we shall have to search rather deeply for the true explanation of this phenomenon. Our modern civilization has to a large extent lost the sense of form—or, to be more exact, the faculty of immediately apprehending formal values. Even in music, where this faculty is absolutely indispensable, a great many listeners get on very comfortably without it, allowing their senses to be flooded formlessly and indiscriminately by the *flow* of sound. Here, where I personally am incompetent, it is possible to see the enormity of the failure: form, in music, is for me a unity only dimly realized, in some few preludes and fugues of Bach, for example. Knowing my limitations in this art, it is easier for me to sympathize with those lovers of art who but dimly apprehend the formal unity of one of your constructions. They see lines meeting and crossing, radiating from certain points, planes intersecting—and there they stop, perhaps secretly



longing for the colour and opacity which you have denied them—for colour is something their atrophied senses can still appreciate.

Why do they stop at that point? My dear Gabo, if we could confidently answer that question we should be close to the secret of the failure of our civilization. We are up against one of the fundamental inhibitions of our society—an inhibition which affects more segments of life than this æsthetic one we are discussing. It affects, most fatally, as I think you realize, our relations with one another—the simple exchange of sympathy and affection, the *reciprocity* which is the secret of social happiness. It is as though a vizor had fallen in front of our eyes, blocking some essential channel of communication. I am speaking in metaphors, but actually I believe that we are dealing with a physiological displacement. Since the triumph of scholasticism in the Middle Ages, the educated classes in Europe have been subjected to an intellectual discipline which has over-developed certain areas of the brain at the expense of others. I can give you the scientific formula for the process: 'The specialized area represented in the forebrain or neopallium, and its connections with adjacent special senses, supersedes and tends in its function even to exclude the reactions which, through the diencephalon, mediate the function expressive of man's organism as a total process.'<sup>1</sup> And this physiologist, who is also a psychologist, then points out that 'this enormous disproportion of function now directed toward the cortical or neopallial segment, due to the preponderant use of the symbol, has made far-reaching and unsuspected encroachments upon the primary feelings and sensations of man as a total organism'. And this is the point which you, as well as I, try to make. You say 'the way in which art perceives the world is sensuous . . . the way it acts in response to this perception is spontaneous, irrational and factual . . . and this is the way of life itself'. Yes, indeed; but it is not the way of life in Europe in this time of Armageddon, which is a time of prejudice, of calculated hatred, of deliberate destruction. For even war, in our 'scientific' civilization, has lost its spontaneity.

I only introduce these larger aspects to show that the problem is not limited to the field of art: we are not opposed merely by a few stupid academicians or jealous rivals: we are fighting a

<sup>1</sup> *The Biology of Human Conflict*, by Trigant Burrow, M.D., Ph.D. New York (Macmillan Company), 1937, p. 117.

mass neurosis which has its roots in the historical developments of the past five centuries. It would therefore be foolish to be very optimistic about our immediate success.

This brings me to the only other comment I wish to make. You betray a social conscience. As a Russian who has experienced in person the terrors and exaltations, the high hopes and frustrations of the greatest social revolution of modern times, you might reasonably have taken refuge in some escapist philosophy. But you still retain a faith in the masses, and you are even confident that these masses would understand and appreciate your constructive art, if allowed a free and unbiased contact with it. To a degree you are perhaps right: I have always found that simple and unsophisticated people have a more natural, serious and sound reaction to abstract art than the neurotic climbers who cling desperately to some rung of the social or educational ladder. But do not ask for the 'judgement' of the masses. That is to encourage the very attitude of intellectual detachment which we are most anxious to avoid. Erect your constructions in public places by all means; but then wait and see . . . The metaphor of the catalyst has been overworked in modern criticism, but it is a very useful one. You must not expect a direct reaction from a work of art in modern society: but dropped like a foreign substance into that agitated sea, it might, without losing either its identity or its purity, effect a transformation both rich and strange.

Yours ever,

H. R.

## GIORGIO DE CHIRICO

### SENSITIVENESS

SENSITIVENESS, in life as in painting and all forms of art, is incontestably a quality appertaining to the human being who possesses it. It is much easier to recognize the sensitiveness of a human being in life than the sensitiveness of an artist in his work. In life, too, living as we are in a period in which people are

extremely keen on empty words, human beings are not satisfied with words only; and though a man may make as many speeches as he please, making manifest the most refined sensitiveness, he will not be believed in and admired with sincerity unless his words be—at least from time to time—confirmed by actions.

Besides, to be truly sensitive in life, a human being must possess many other qualities; for one cannot conceive of a human being endowed with sensitiveness alone; with sensitiveness as his sole intellectual quality, while being in every other respect unintelligent, wicked, envious, miserly and tale-bearing. The sensitiveness which is attributed to a given human being is inconceivable unless the spirit of this human being be as a whole noble, full of goodness, and endowed of course with a certain intelligence. In other words, sensitiveness as a moral quality is never found alone, but forms part of a whole *ensemble* of superior qualities united in the character and intellect of a man or woman. This truth is clear and can be understood by all; to call it in question is pointless.

On the other hand, with regard to art, almost everyone's ideas are confused. Today, when referring to a work of art, human beings take real pleasure in using words which have a logical meaning when applied to life, but whose sense—when applied to works of art—changes even to the extent of sounding absurd. For instance, it is often said of a picture: This picture is not extraordinary, it is nothing remarkable, but '*it shows great sensitiveness*'. In other words, its only quality—a quality entirely divorced from all other positive qualities (which are apparently lacking in this case)—is *sensitiveness*. This would imply that the picture in question—a picture possessing sensitiveness—is in every other respect poor, badly painted and badly drawn by an artist undoubtedly devoid of all talent; while talent is the first thing we should consider when judging a work of art.

Let us therefore examine whether we can or cannot accept the hypothesis that in a work of art, as in an individual, sensitiveness must necessarily form part of a whole group of qualities which, in a painting, either exist all together or do not exist at all.

The innumerable words which are part and parcel of the vocabulary of so many dilettante and ignorant critics and intellectuals—words like 'sensitiveness,' 'sincerity,' 'emotion,' 'spontaneity,' 'purity' and so on and so forth—can only be used to

define in detail qualities already existing in a work of art; and none of these qualities can exist *as an isolated and detached phenomenon*.

The way in which a sensitive person reacts to life is known to us either by experience or by hearsay. But the way in which sensitiveness makes itself manifest in art and in painting is known only to the very few who know *the way in which the sensitiveness factor functions in a work of art*. You may now ask me how the word sensitiveness comes to be heard on so many lips. The word is heard on many lips, yes; but *is in few minds*. And this is understandable, for sensitiveness as understood by modernist painters and intellectuals does not exist in painting; it is the invention of the modern critics who, having no clear and interesting ideas to express, have created a complete special vocabulary which in actual fact has no meaning at all, but which has been picked up in all innocence and weakly adopted by so many persons desirous of appearing shrewd and subtle art connoisseurs.

I repeat therefore that the critics have created a language the majority of whose words are in no way fit to be applied to a work of art. This *modern* jargon seems to have been invented with the express purpose of rendering the stupidity and confusion already reigning in the minds of men even more acute.

In life a human being's sensitiveness can be tested by facts; but sensitiveness—I maintain—when applied to a work of art *does not exist*. And when someone, speaking of a picture, tells me that *it shows sensitiveness*, I can only reply that I am ready to believe as much, but only on condition that it can be proven.

### SINCERITY

ANOTHER word which is very fashionable today and yet is devoid of all meaning, is *sincerity*. This word is quite frequently applied to works of art. What does '*sincerity*' mean in an artist? One can be sincere in friendship, love, business, social relations in general, in fact in life, but in art *one is always sincere*; this means that by *force majeure* an artist is always sincere in the exercise of his art. The artist always does that and that only which he is capable of doing; he cannot surpass himself, for he can only attain the level which his talent and his artistic abilities allow him to reach. Besides, an artist will never try to do less well than he is capable of doing. Remember what I have told you several times—*in art it is not the subject but only qualities that matter*.

The value of an artist consists not in what he does, but solely in how he does it. Rest assured, you critics and intellectuals, in art things don't work out as they do in your speeches; in art *every one is sincere*. And to conclude, I want to add this: If your speeches are not always sincere, Oh critics and intellectuals, console yourselves; for, whenever you speak and whenever you write, you always reveal the degree of your intelligence with the utmost sincerity.

*Translated from the Italian by BERYL EEMAN*

EDWARD SACKVILLE-WEST

## MUSIC: SOME ASPECTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY PROBLEM

### II

I HAVE devoted the first sections of this essay to setting out some of those aspects of musical art which seem to me usually to receive less critical attention than they deserve. But the contemporary problem is immediate, and the more important reason for examining the points I have touched upon was their application to two English composers, Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett, who alone seem to me to demand the kind of attention reserved for *chefs d'école*. This is tantamount to saying that these two young men are the most important of living English composers; and, with the big exception of Ralph Vaughan Williams, I believe that to be true. The outlook on music which unites Britten and Tippett in a common aim is a fact and should emerge in the course of this article; to begin with I am concerned with idiosyncrasies, and so will take these composers one by one.

Britten is now thirty. That is young, but it is the right age for a composer to reach maturity, for the tension of musical composition is probably the greatest of artistic tensions and usually shows a shorter *Blütezeit* than the other arts. So it is a cause for thankfulness that Britten was a prodigy, who has composed music of all kinds (and played at least two instruments) since childhood: he has wasted no time at all. The amount of *juvenilia*

composed and rejected, in such a case, is of less importance than the first work the composer sees fit to publish. Much can be judged from this, and I think insufficient attention has been given—even among his admirers—to Britten's *opus* 1, the *Sinfonietta*. This was written at the age of nineteen and the time of composition is given in the score as three weeks.

Now much animadversion has been spent on Britten's apparent rapidity in composition, which is equated, without more ado, with shallowness and frivolity. But there are surely two considerations here which must be taken into account: the *kind* of music, and the time that music has spent in the composer's mind before ever it gets put on to paper. It is clear, I think, that not all music should come from the same depth in the personality, or should conjugate quite the same faculties. To be unable to compose (or write, or paint) without giving everything you have, is a sign of the amateur. A lot of music is, and ought to be, occasional in character, and it is one of the marks of the truly professional artist that he can turn out what is required in a short time and without taxing his higher powers at all. Britten has at all times written music of this description—for plays by Auden and Isherwood, and for a quantity of broadcast features;<sup>1</sup> the church cantata, *Rejoice in the Lamb*, also belongs essentially to this category. His success here has been outstanding and is due to professional ability combined with the kind of cleverness that pounces immediately upon what is germane to a problem and what is not. At the same time, the speed at which he writes such music as this bears no relation to the equally prodigious speed at which his independent works are apparently produced. For Britten is one of those composers (Mozart was also among them) in whose mind a work comes slowly to fruition, over a period of months, or even years, and then, when the moment is ripe, down it goes on to paper at dictation speed. The great beauty and neatness of Britten's MS. scores testify to the state of clarity in which the music exists at the moment of being written down.

To return to the *Sinfonietta*, this is a piece which already

<sup>1</sup> On occasions like these, where the music is only an adjunct, it is as inartistic to write stuff that is too good as not to write it on occasions where the music is of first importance. Conversely, a poet, asked to supply a composer with the text of an opera, does wrong to produce a poetic drama good enough to stand by itself.

displays, in miniature, some of the qualities of Britten's mature music. The ingenuity of the scoring; the absolute ear (what other British composer would have used an oboe for the opening theme, in that register?); the dramatic muscularity of the form, of which one feature is the surface-tension produced by the cunning disposition of parts; finally, that clear melodic line, creating its own harmony, which, in Britten's later works, have won him so spontaneous a reception. Also present, but less admirable, is the somewhat hubristic reliance on technical tricks and devices of wit, which is natural enough in a very young artist and which certain critics (to my mind, without justification) have continued to find in his music ever since.

A preference for the clean and the clear need not take a composer further than it took Cimarosa or Field or Eric Satie. It is easy to imagine you are being classical when all that you are being is *jejune*. In Britten's case the preference, is, however, not an attitude but a simple outcome of personality, in which condition it possesses equanimity as well as breadth of reference. Nor does it reflect an outlook characteristic of certain sensitive but frigid and prematurely withered natures, who retire into classicism as into a shell. Any account of Britten's music that attempts to go beneath the surface must, of course, reckon with his personality, which is intensely English. Born and brought up in East Anglia, he has retained an exclusive love of that severe but indeterminate landscape—the enormous skies, the huddled villages and pointing trees, the sudden sails and osier-secret rivers, of that deeply eroded coast. With his tight hair, bird-like profile, weatherbeaten blue eyes and athletic hands, he suggests suitability to that world. More curiously perhaps—for artists are not seldom at loggerheads with their surroundings—he is at home with anybody whose social approach is simple and direct, and since he was blessed with physical as well as mental agility to a quite unusual degree, it does not seem that the misery which tortures so many sensitive boys in their childhood and schooldays was ever his. There is nothing but gain in this—suffering had better not come to anyone too soon; but the narrow, quizzical gaze, which is variously interpreted as mistrust, reserve, and simple shyness, does suggest some version of that inner solitude—as if the soul were peeping through a grille—which is a cherished peculiarity of the Anglo-Saxon male.



The growth of those who profess the poetic view of life differs from that of other people, not only in the intensity of the experience, but in the 'shape' of what is retained. Every human being makes the *via crucis* from innocence to experience, but it is the poet's privilege to double the course, recapturing innocence at a higher level, where it can then be put to use and not merely endured—the steps of this progress are in Britten's case remarkably clear. His earliest musical influences—Mozart and Schubert—led naturally to a deep admiration for Mahler, in whose music the second realization of innocence is so movingly displayed. Other youthful influences either implemented or cut across these: Frank Bridge, for years Britten's master of composition, a musician whose importance for English music has yet to be fully acknowledged; W. H. Auden, whose influence was chiefly political and becomes imperceptible after *Les Illuminations*; and finally what I can only describe as the Fun Fair—that glorious conglomeration of popular music, balladry, coconut shies and merry-go-rounds, and all the caps-back-to-front paraphernalia of the English *festa*, with its echoing overtones from childhood, schooldays, nonsense jokes, family cosiness, and the entrancements of the Christmas tree.

I have perhaps said enough to establish the intense Englishry of Britten's imaginative background. Remains to fit the *œuvre* into it. Youthful high spirits, delight in technical brilliance, reckless neglect of consequences—all the superficial results of mere living are to be found in the unpleasant *Piano Concerto*, with its meagre material and its hollow emphasis on sonority. This was an unfortunate moment, but a passing one. Already, the *Variations for String Orchestra* had drawn upon kindred sources, but to far better effect. The *Variations* are as clever as the *Concerto*, but they are also beautiful, with a nostalgia derived from Mahler. This is, I think, the first time in Britten's music that Mahler's influence shows itself plainly.

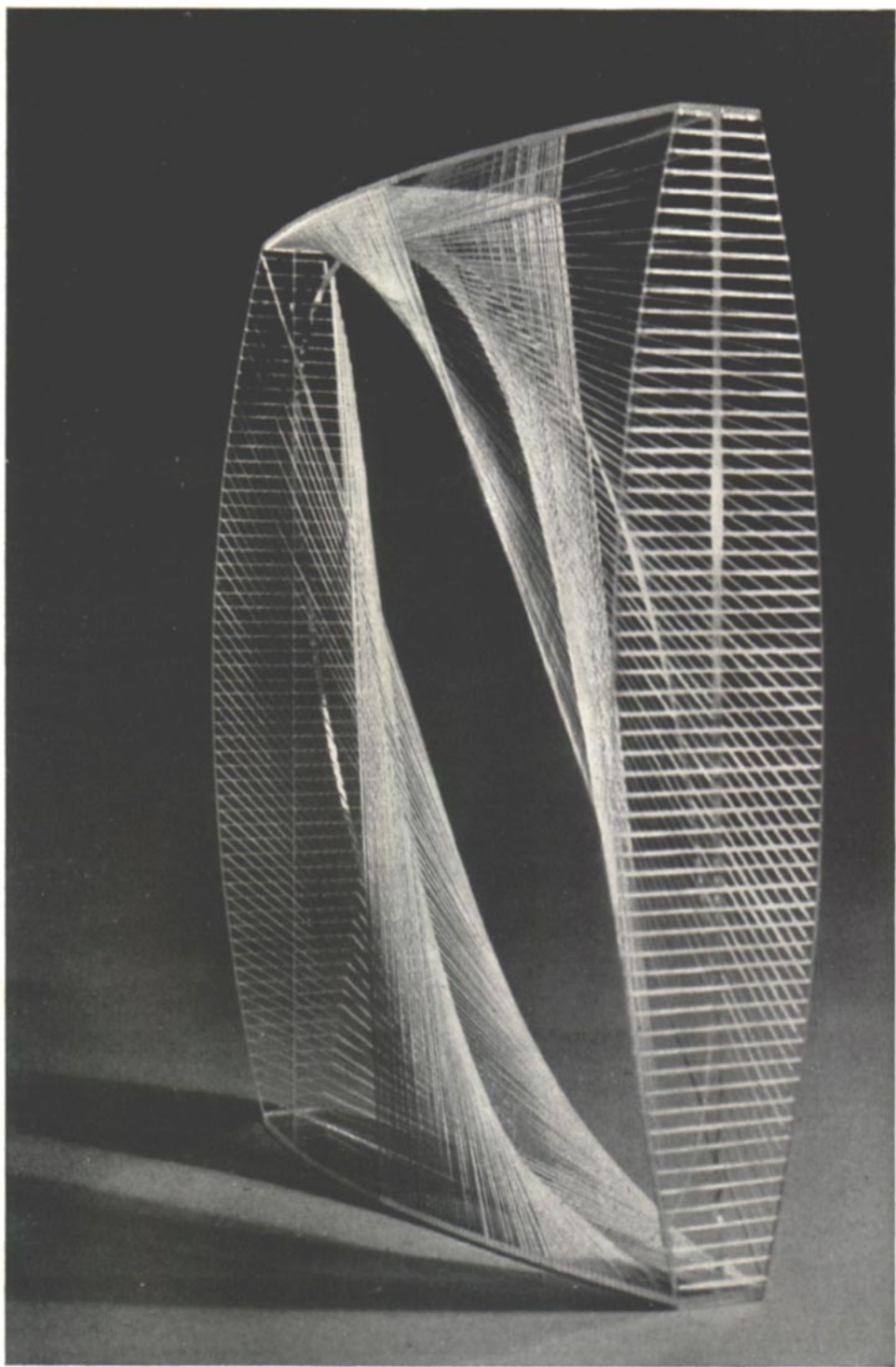
It is entirely absent from that dazzling exercise in the picturesque, the settings of poems from Rimbaud's *Les Illuminations*, a work which, together with the *Violin Concerto*, seems to me to mark the end of his first period of composition. Britten is here still executing brilliant paraphs on the surface of his personality. The emotion is there—below the ice; it does not yet come through. But incidental gains are numerous: increased sense of style, a firm

grasp of voice line, a felicity of instrumentation that no longer depends on tricks.

*Les Illuminations* will probably remain one of Britten's most popular pieces—luckily, for all the right reasons. Indeed, few composers have possessed such a knack for offering the public the right end of the stick. What is esoteric in the text of these songs is easily resolved into the melodious and the dramatic, and the result is a virtuoso performance which the young Liszt might have envied. Still, as I have remarked, the emotion is still latent—unborn; that which appears (in *Being Beateous*, in *Départ*) seems the reflection of a truth, rather than that truth itself. The rhetoric is just not persuasive enough to outlast the final bar.

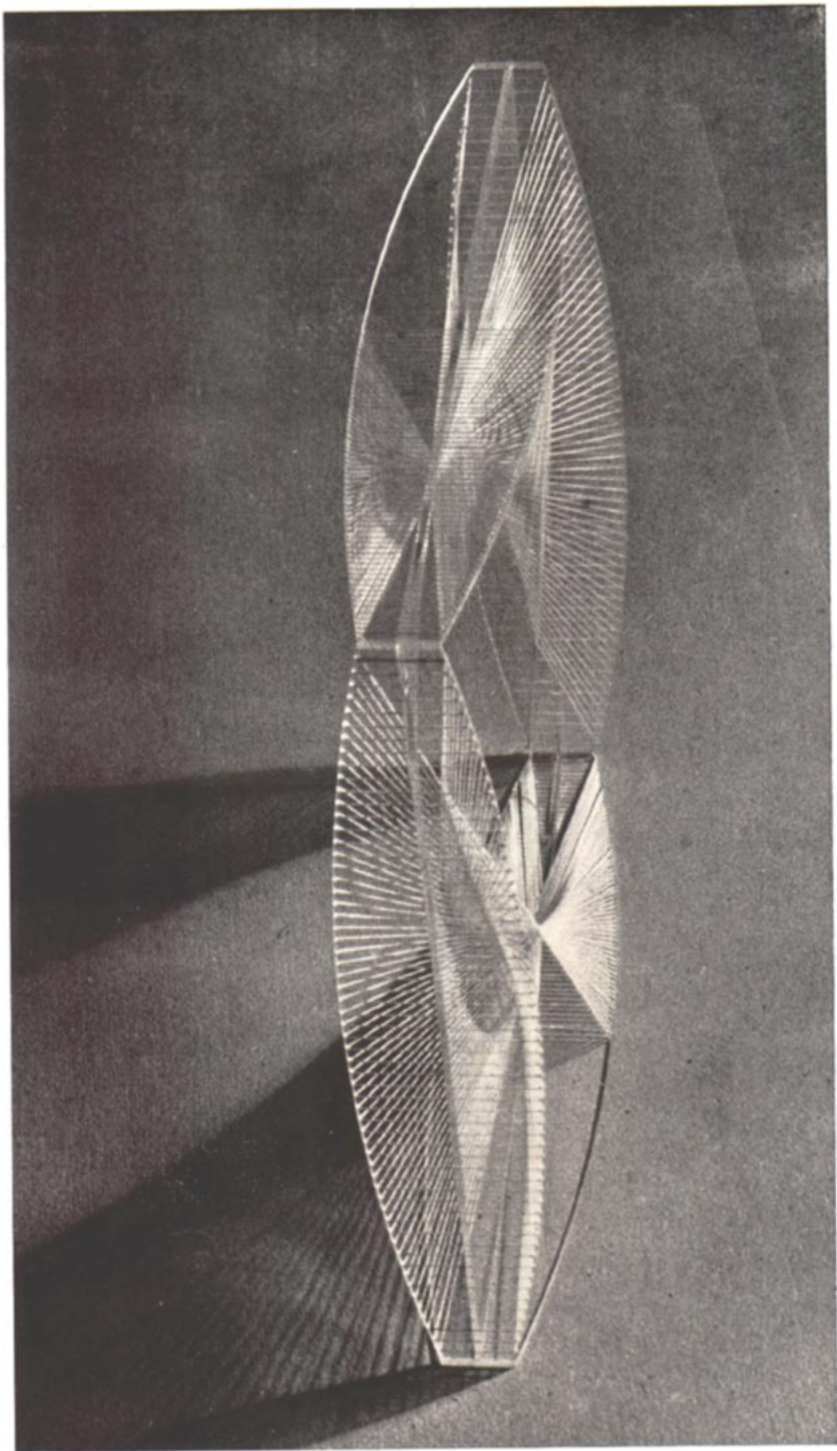
Judging by a single performance I should say the same of the *Violin Concerto*, which is, however, a far abler example of the form than the *Piano Concerto*. Nevertheless it is an occasional piece, though serious enough in its way: the beauty of the *Passacaglia* and final coda belongs to that of all 'made' music.

With the *Sinfonia da Requiem*, the *String Quartet*, and the *Michelangelo Sonnets*, written during his three-year stay in America, Britten attained the first stage of his maturity. The progress—emotional and therefore also musical—on his earlier work is overwhelming. It is as if something had suddenly been released—but released only into the iron control of a fully conscious artist. Up till now Britten had dramatized each problem by placing a soloist (singer, pianist, violinist) in opposition to a body of instruments; now for the first time, in the *Sinfonia da Requiem*, the full orchestra assumes the entire burden. The music is still dramatic, in the narrower sense of making us *see* something; and I have the impression that, superbly effective as the result is, the composer would not now choose quite the same method. It is possible that the conjunction of a private grief with the European tragedy of the spring of 1940 may have imposed the form of this symphony; in any case the point I wish to press is the *humanity* of the music. Quite apart from the Mahlerian phraseology in which the themes are couched, this is Britten's least English, most international work—which perhaps accounts for its instantaneous acceptance in countries as culturally disparate as America, Sweden and Portugal. It was too alarming to become popular, but its appearance was evidence that Britten had at last forsaken the primrose path of mere charm.



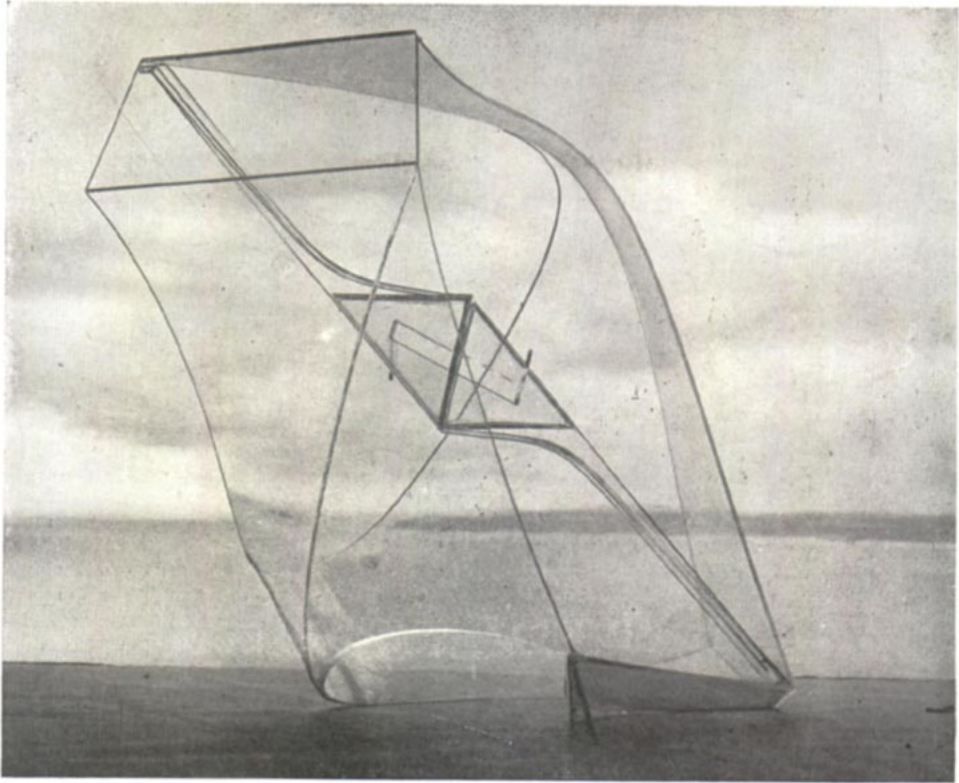
N. GABO. Linear Construction in Space. 1942-1943

PRODUCED 2003 BY UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



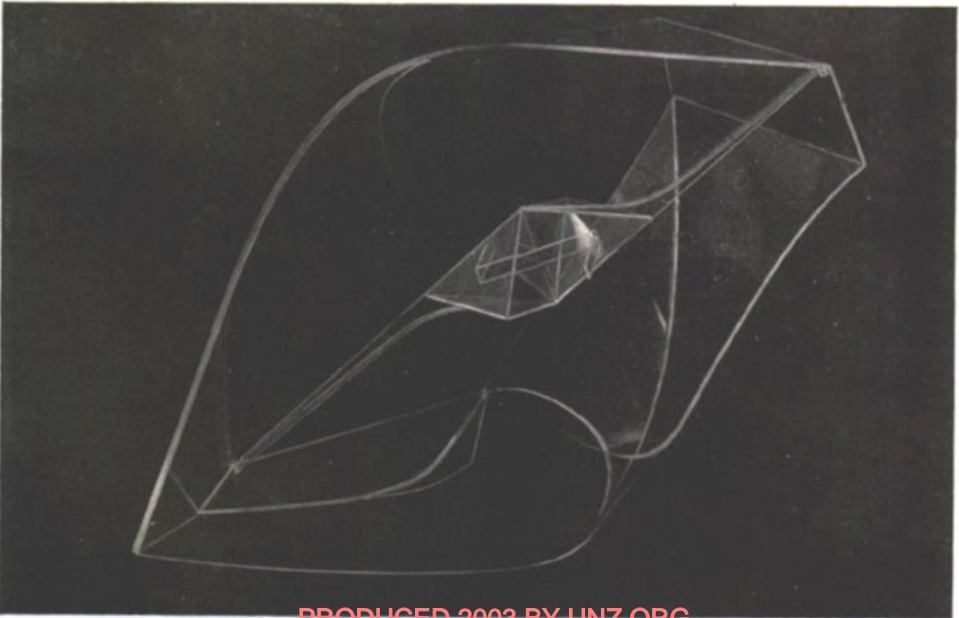
Linear Construction in Space. 1942-1943  
PRODUCED 2003 BY UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

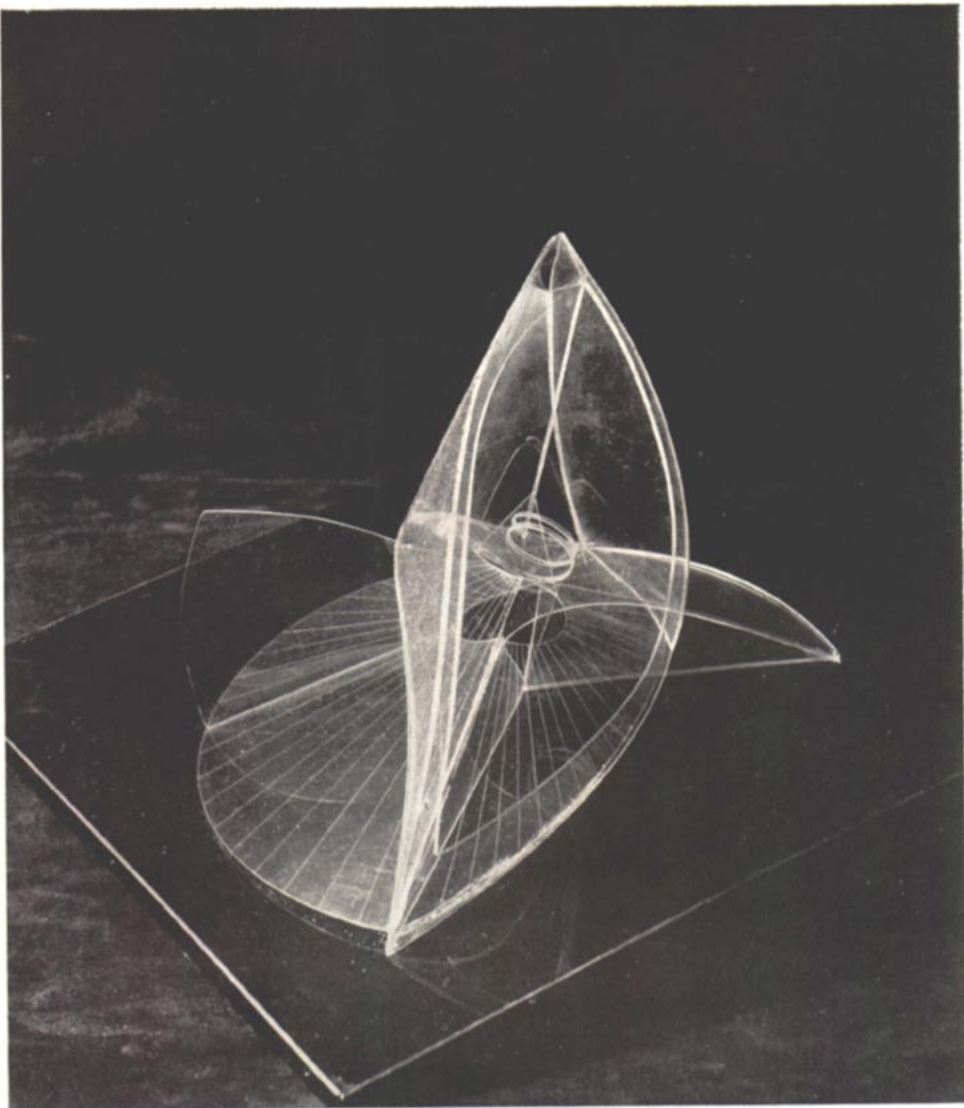




Construction in Space. 1938

Construction in Space. 1938





Construction in Space. Spiral Theme. 1941

The *String Quartet* and the *Michelangelo Sonnets* implement the decision, the first by a stylistic severity that relates it to the quartets of Bartok, the second by a complete avoidance of all decoration and a reliance on the voice line alone to express a profound but complex emotion. The *Quartet* contains some of Britten's best musical thought, but it is inordinately difficult to play and the poetry has not perhaps the immediate appeal of the vocal music. The superior difficulty of this work—the obvious fact that, like all chamber music, it is intended for the few—is an illustration of Britten's instinctive perception of the subtle requirements of *genre*.

Where the *Quartet* pursues a solitary, mountainous path, the *Michelangelo Sonnets* deal, to put it briefly, with the pains and triumphs of love. They have been, without exception, the composer's most widely applauded work to date, and the reason is not far to seek. The simplicity, the melodic beauty, and above all the warmth of feeling, which inform these astonishing songs, combine to form an eloquence that is irresistible. It is the eloquence of line drawing, not of painting. The Italianate manner is of course deliberate and reflects Britten's profound affection (which has since increased, if anything) for the style of Verdi. What is remarkable is that he has been able to employ this style without conveying an impression of *pastiche*. Some critics have received that impression, but my own has from the first been that the harmonic idiom is so individual and so consistent that it etches the nineteenth century Italian sweetness right out of the background, leaving only the 'clean and clear' contemporary line. Never before had Britten achieved so searching a melodic beauty as in some of these sonnets, and although the verbal sequences of thought are often arcane, they are (as in the case of *Les Illuminations*) resolved into a muscular delicacy of form which makes each sonnet as easy to digest as a folk song. The interest is throughout entirely centred in the voice and the accompaniments are exceedingly spare. This is no doubt as it should be; but I continue to feel that, with one or two exceptions, these accompaniments are not essentially pianistic and that an orchestral version would deepen and enhance the emotional effect without detracting from the dramatic lyricism of the vocal part.

*To be concluded.*



---

# ROBERT FROST

## COME IN

Selected, and with a Commentary and Biographical  
Introduction by LOUIS UNTERMAYER

The eighty poems in this volume, selected by Louis Untermeyer, are a part of Robert Frost's contribution to American Literature. They have been chosen from his seven volumes, from *A Boy's Will* to *A Witness Tree*. As a group, these poems include his most famous and popular work.

He is a poet who takes his place in company with Whitman, Longfellow, Whittier, Lovell: those whose work enriched the stream of poetry written in the English language which emanated from America.

Louis Untermeyer's commentary is written with wisdom, understanding, and sympathy. It is a notable addition to the poems themselves. It tells the reader only what he needs to know to savour the poems fully, and never trespasses upon the magic of Mr. Frost's verse. The biographical introduction not only presents the most complete and up-to-date account of the poet, but contains new information of interest to all students and collectors of Frost's work.

7s. 6d. net

JONATHAN CAPE

---

Published by the Proprietors, HORIZON, 6 Selwyn House, Lansdowne Terrace,  
London, W.C.2, and printed in England at The Curwen Press Ltd., Plaistow, London, E.13